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A male Honey-buzzard named 'Turnberry', central Scotland, 1 August 2018. For details about this breeding bird see the article by McInerny *et al.* on pages 308–313. © *John Anderson*

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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery – one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

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As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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First thoughts from a new President

The highlight of the trip north to Aviemore for the autumn conference and AGM was undoubtedly the sight of ten Blackcock feeding in a field just south of the House of Bruar on the west side of the A9. The upturn of the fortunes of Black Grouse in Perthshire is a real tribute to the efforts of all the folk concerned with their conservation.

Plate 345. Ian Bainbridge, Aviemore, Highland, 28 October 2018. © *David Palmar /www.photoscot.co.uk*

Once at Aviemore, the conference was as warm and interesting as the weather was crisp and cold. Thought-provoking presentations on rewilding, new woodland birds and pinewood management painted the need for conservation on a large scale, within which our reintroduced raptors should be expected to thrive. In real contrast, we learned about the migrants using the metal oases that are the North Sea oil platforms, and work to understand House Sparrow declines in Glasgow. Common through most of these presentations was the value of good data and the role of bird recording; we can all do our bit for bird conservation in Scotland. A full conference report will be produced elsewhere, but I'd like to thank all the speakers and the excellent work of the HQ staff, ably led by Wendy Hicks, who ensured we had a terrific weekend.

The conference also included the AGM at which I took on the role of SOC President, and the Club made important changes to its officer positions. These are a result of the excellent stewardship of James Main's presidency and the deliberations of the Council's Strategy Group over recent months. I'd like to thanks James for all his hard work; he has steered the organisation really well in his term of office, and I hope he will see the SOC continue to change with the times and meet the new challenges ahead. The result of these changes is that I will have the help of two Vice-Presidents; Jeremy Wilson leading on birding and science, and Lesley Creamer on management and infrastructure. We hope this structure will give us a strong base to continue to develop the Club, ably supported by Dave Heeley as Secretary and Andy Thorpe as Treasurer, both of whom demonstrated their abilities during the AGM, and in Andy's case talking about North Sea birds as well.

So, what are the challenges ahead? I have two in mind already: the first is making sure the SOC stays relevant to the next generation of birders, and it was great to hear from two of them at the conference. We need to learn more of what will help them with their birding, and it is really heart-warming that the Isle of May Bird Observatory/SOC Young Birders' Training Course has been nominated for one of the Nature of Scotland awards this autumn. Practical birding like this needs to be an important part of our work.

That ties in with the second challenge: making our birding and bird recording count for bird conservation. We can all help with national bird surveys, from WeBS to Willow Tits, and records into BirdTrack all contribute to our knowledge and understanding. With devolution, it is all the more important that we know about Scottish bird trends, not just UK ones, and I look forward to seeing better development of these in the coming years.

In the meantime, I'll have much to learn, and would be very happy to hear from any SOC member; you can get in touch with me at president@the-soc.org.uk and let me know your views.

Ian Bainbridge, SOC President.

Plate 246. This field near Blackford, Perthshire, held up to three pairs of Oystercatchers, 14 pairs of Lapwings and five pairs of Redshanks in the early 1990s but lack of grazing and failure to mow rushes annually led to its abandonment by breeding waders apart from an occasional pair of Curlew. © *M.V. Bell*

The decline of a population of farmland breeding waders in Strathallan, Perthshire - some further observations

M.V. BELL

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a large population of farmland breeding waders in Strathallan, Perthshire (Plate 246) identified as a key site for these species (O'Brien 1996, O'Brien & Bainbridge 2002) with densities of nesting Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (35.6 pairs/km^2) among the highest recorded in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The nesting waders in a core survey area of 7.5 km^2 of Strathallan were monitored annually from 1990 to 2015 with an additional 10.3 km^2 monitored less frequently (Bell & Calladine 2017). All species showed large declines over the study period, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* by 95%, Lapwing by 88%, Curlew *Numenius arquata* by 67% and Redshank *Tringa totanus* by 87% from peaks of 125 pairs, 365 pairs, 57 pairs and 53 pairs respectively. These declines were larger than those estimated across the UK by the Breeding Bird Survey (Harris *et al.* 2016), probably because this population was at a higher density to start with and therefore had further to fall. Up to five pairs of Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* also nested annually up to 2002. In Strathallan changes in spring sward height, and particularly the loss of short swards, considered to be due to changes in field management (Plate 246), contributed to deterioration in habitat quality for breeding waders over the survey period (Bell & Calladine 2017). Across much of lowland Britain it has been a change from spring tillage to autumn tillage and more intensive management of grasslands, including drainage, which has led to the decline

in breeding waders. The move from mixed farms with spring arable and pasture to farms with either arable or pasture is also thought to be especially detrimental for Lapwing (Sheldon *et al.* 2004). In Strathallan it was generally a move to more extensive management or the abandonment of fields for cropping or livestock grazing driving the changes. However, the decline was far greater than could be accounted for by changes in habitat quality alone. The productivity of a sample of Lapwings was poor throughout the study period. A figure of 0.6–0.8 fledged young/pair was suggested to be necessary to sustain a population of Lapwings by Macdonald & Bolton (2008) but in this study productivity was only above 0.6 young/pair in three years and was below 0.25 young/pair in 14 of the 22 years in which it was assessed (12 to 63 pairs annually) (Bell & Calladine 2017). A number of factors probably contributed to this low productivity but it was not possible to quantify all these during this study. Some likely mechanisms, based on qualitative observations during the study, are discussed below.

Weather

Poor spring weather appeared to be an important determinant of chick survival in some years. Days with low temperatures, continuous rain and strong winds coincided with the small chick stage in several springs during the 1990s and early 2000s. It is widely accepted that poor spring weather has impacts on Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* productivity and populations (Moss *et al.* 2001) and many grouse moor keepers know that cold wet days at hatching time can severely affect the surplus of Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus lagopus* available for shooting, but few scientific studies have attempted to show a statistical correlation between bad weather days at hatching, productivity and population change in nidifugous species. A study of breeding Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Redshank in meadows in the Netherlands found that in adverse weather conditions small chicks may require so much brooding that too little time remains to feed. Chicks then show retarded growth and may eventually die of starvation (Beintema & Visser 1989). Low temperatures have been shown to affect the growth rate of the chicks of other wader species, e.g. in the Peak District a study of Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* showed the fledging period varied from 33 to 42 days depending on the weather (Pearce-Higgins & Yalden 2002). Studies examining the productivity of waders should ideally also be recording daily rainfall, temperature and wind strength data at the site in question and not relying on average monthly data from weather stations remote from the site.

The loss of sward height heterogeneity probably makes breeding waders less resilient to poor weather if the very short swards (suitable for small chicks to feed without getting soaked) disappear. This appeared to be the case in many of the fields of managed grass, rough grass and rush pasture which were favoured by breeding waders in Strathallan. Some fields that were suitable for nesting in mid-April probably became unsuitable for rearing chicks by mid-May in wet weather. It was unclear how many pairs re-nested after failures at the small chick stage but a few late broods of Lapwing were noted in most years. The conclusion that poor spring weather affects productivity and populations of Capercaillie and Red Grouse would seem to be equally applicable to breeding waders. The optimisation of sward height for chick rearing will be increasingly important with more extreme rainfall events in spring.

Predation

Unravelling the effects of predators on nest and chick survival is challenging, requiring either intensive observations, temperature loggers or the use of remote cameras (e.g. Calladine *et al.* 2017), including night vision equipment. Studies on survival of wader chicks have often been intensive, for example requiring radio-tracking (e.g. Mason *et al.* 2017), with potential implications of additional disturbance. An experimental study on grouse moors demonstrated a positive influence of controlling predators for breeding waders (Fletcher *et al.* 2010). However, a review on the effects of controlling Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* and Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* on the productivity of Lapwing on nature reserves produced ambiguous results (Bolton *et al.* 2007).

Interpretation of the results was complicated by very different results from different sites and by the fact that Foxes did not appear to be the main mammalian predator at some sites. Avian predators are generally the most obvious but studies with temperature loggers in nests showed that the majority of predation at wader nests occurred at night and cameras at nests showed mammals to be the major predators, mainly Foxes (MacDonald & Bolton 2008).

The Strathallan study area had all the potential common nest predators. Mammalian predators were represented by Red Fox, Stoat *Mustela erminea*, Otter *Lutra lutra*, American Mink *Neovison vison* and Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus*. There was an increase in keepering effort on the main estate in the valley from 2001 onwards, following the release of Pheasants *Phasianus colchicus* for shooting, which probably led to a decrease in the numbers of Foxes and Stoats across part of the survey area. However, the large-scale release of captive-bred Pheasants could potentially be a significant addition to the food available for predators and scavengers leading to an increase in predators which could lead to increased pressure on other species, notably ground nesting waders.

The densities of avian predators increased in Strathallan during the study period. At one site of 1.7 km^2 Carrion Crows increased from one pair in 1990 to four pairs by 1999 with 6–9 pairs from 2004 to 2015 while occurrences of non-breeding flocks of crows in the valley increased from 1999 with flocks of 10–20 noted frequently from the early 2000s and larger flocks (up to 54) occasionally. Oystercatchers and Lapwings nesting at higher densities appeared capable of chasing off single crows. However, the appearance of non-breeding flocks of crows appeared to change this dynamic and as wader populations fell they were unable to protect nests and chicks. Clustering of nests by Lapwings can allow more efficient protection of nests from crows and the productivity of single pairs of Lapwings tended to be lower than those pairs nesting in groups (Elliot 1985). Buzzards *Buteo buteo* also increased rapidly from the late 1980s to a density of c.1.2 pairs/km^2 over c.50 km^2 of Strathallan by the early 2000s but have declined to c.0.6 pairs/km^2 since, particularly from 2010 onwards following two snowy winters and a large reduction in the number of Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* in the valley. Over many hours of observation of the breeding waders Buzzards were never seen to take a wader chick or attempt to take a chick. However, Buzzards are opportunist predators and will take birds, mainly as fledglings, to feed broods (Dare 2015). A small and increasing population of Red Kites *Milvus milvus* have nested in Strathallan since 2002 and on one occasion a Red Kite was seen to take a c.18 day old Lapwing chick. The mobbing response of Oystercatchers and Lapwings to Buzzards appeared less vigourous than for Red Kites or Carrion Crows. The mobbing response to predators by nesting waders has been used to infer predation risk (e.g. Sasvári & Hegyi 2000) but this approach suffers from the same potential bias as observations of nest predation. Nesting Lapwings were observed to vigorously mob cock Pheasants on a number of occasions. It would be interesting to know whether this was just because they were too close to a nest or chick or whether Pheasants are a real threat to eggs and small chicks. However, despite marked increases in avian predators in Strathallan during this study no change in breeding success by Lapwings was detected in the sampled parts of the study area.

Isolated trees and small plantations thoughout the valley provided plenty of nest sites for Carrion Crows and cover for mammalian predators. Farm woodland schemes and the planting of new hedgerows, while benefiting small passerines, are likely to make areas less suitable for breeding waders due to the edge effect whereby breeding waders are known to avoid nesting in the proximity of trees. Most studies of the edge effect have examined upland breeding waders rather than farmland waders but a study of Curlew on tilled farmland in Finland found that only 20% of nests hatched young in a landscape where points on average were 180 m from forestry compared to 91% hatching when an average of 600 m from forestry (Valkama *et al.* 1999).

The stage at which breeding attempts failed appeared to change during the study period. In the 1990s hatching success appeared to be good and many small chicks of Oystercatcher, Lapwing

and Redshank were seen. Chick survival must then have been poor resulting in the poor productivity recorded. As discussed above poor weather was thought to be important in some years but predation must also have been a factor. By the 2000s few small chicks were observed and many nests of Lapwing were failing at the egg stage, often within a few days, with multiple nesting attempts being made in those fields where observations were made weekly or more frequently. Subsequent survival of chicks must therefore have improved to account for an unchanged productivity over the study period.

Land management and farming activities

A study of nesting Lapwings in the north Pennines showed that productivity was lower on improved grassland than on unimproved grassland, with higher predation of clutches by predators and greater destruction of clutches by agricultural machinery and trampling by livestock on improved grassland (Baines 1990). In Strathallan most ploughing of fields for spring arable crops occurred in spring, sometimes as late as mid-April, while ploughing for potatoes could occur in May and ploughing for autumn fodder crops for sheep could occur as late as June or July. Some grass fields for silage or hay were rolled during the spring. More intensive grazing probably led to trampling of some nests, especially in fields used by cattle and for lambing. These factors varied between fields and farms in different years. Pairs of Lapwing with nests destroyed by ploughing and sowing in April quickly relaid so it was not clear whether this ultimately affected productivity.

The site that retained breeding waders best was a small organic farm (c.80 ha) which won an RSPB Lapwing Award in 2006. Here the decline of Oystercatcher was 75% (maximum eight pairs to two pairs) and of Lapwing 60% (maximum of 30 pairs to 12 pairs) while Redshank increased from two to 3–5 pairs. This farm, which also holds a good population of breeding passerines, has benefited from agri-environment funding in the past but was unable to meet the criteria for further funding in the latest round of grants. However, a neighbouring farm with a similar cropping and grazing regime showed large declines similar to those across most of the valley, again making it difficult to reach firm conclusions as to the causes of the decline. Large sums of public money have been spent on agri-environment schemes to reverse the declines of farmland breeding birds with mixed success. Their effectiveness in relation to farmland breeding waders in Scotland was reviewed by O'Brien & Wilson (2011). They concluded that the management requirements in the schemes were not sufficiently prescriptive, particularly in relation to grazing and sward height, and that better verification was needed to check progress over the five-year agreement periods. Many farmers regard a short sward as around 10 cm height whereas a newly hatched Lapwing or Redshank chick requires a sward of c.3 cm to allow feeding when the vegetation is wet. It is unfortunate that farms with a high value for wildlife cannot access agri-environment scheme funding, since the protection and enhancement of existing habitats is likely to be a more efficient use of resources than trying to create suitable new habitat. A results-based payment system is being piloted in England which includes some farms for breeding waders in the Yorkshire Dales (www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england).

The only site in the study area with any conservation designations was the Carsebreck and Rhynd Lochs which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), European Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site. This was one of the first sites in the valley to lose its breeding waders with a change from grazing by cattle to sheep in 1989 leading to a sharp increase in people and dogs visiting the site and a subsequent slow deterioration in habitat quality with Lapwing dropping from 21 pairs to one pair, Curlew from 16 pairs to two pairs and Redshank from 10 pairs to two pairs. Although this site was designated as a SSSI for the goose roost and wetland flora it also had an outstanding assembly of breeding waterbirds and waders in the late 1980s. That such a large decline in breeding waders could occur on a site which on paper appears well-protected suggests that a more holistic approach to wildlife management is required on such sites.

Disturbance from recreational activities

Many of the spring arable fields in the study area were put into long term set-aside in the early 1990s. Initially these proved very attractive to nesting waders with densities of Oystercatcher and Lapwing as high as in any crop type recorded during the study but as they became dominated by coarser grasses and taller plant species they were largely abandoned. An unexpected side-effect of set-aside was an increase in disturbance from people and especially dog-walkers. Fields with no livestock or no arable crop were seen as suitable for running the dog and any field adjoining a road or track with a suitable parking place was vulnerable to human disturbance. Breeding waders disappeared quickly in most of these fields. It was not possible to quantify this effect in terms of the number of disturbance events per field and breeding failures and subsequent abandonment, but in a core survey area comprising 65 fields at least 12 were believed to have become unsuitable for breeding waders due to disturbance, though increases in sward height made most of them unsuitable for breeding waders subsequently. Disturbance from dog-walkers remained an issue in some fields up to the end of the study. An increase in new housing in the local villages and countryside contributed to this pressure from dog owners. Many species of birds are affected by disturbance from humans, especially ground-nesting birds and concentrations of feeding or roosting waterfowl and waders in winter, but habitat loss caused by such disturbance is rarely quantified. Few studies appear to have looked specifically at disturbance from dogs. Piping Plovers *Charadrius melodus* in Nebraska, USA were more likely to leave their nest in response to the presence of dog(s), even when the dogs were leashed and restrained by humans, than they were for humans alone or from vehicles (Jorgensen *et al.* 2016). Habitat loss for wildlife caused by human disturbance is rarely considered by those organisations promoting more access to the countryside.

Conclusions

Over the 25 year study period the number of changes which have impacted on breeding waders make interpretation of the results difficult. Changes in cropping and grazing regimes on different farms at different times have mainly been detrimental but sometimes beneficial, while disturbance from people and dogs has varied in different fields with time. Superimposed on these changes in management have been poor spring weather and changes to the numbers and composition of potential predators of eggs and chicks.

The present lowland farmed landscape is a largely hostile environment for breeding waders as their habitat requirements are no longer compatible with modern farming. Was the abundance of farmland breeding waders an artefact of a fortuitously beneficial farming system and ruthless control of predators? It is unlikely that the population of breeding waders in Strathallan and elsewhere will recover unless there is a major change in land-use driven by a farming policy which supports high-quality agri-environment schemes like the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme or their equivalent. Management actions would require the optimisation of crop type and livestock grazing to deliver the necessary heterogeneity of sward heights, elimination of human disturbance and control of predators, especially Carrion Crows and Foxes. The rapidity of the decline of the breeding waders in Strathallan is worrying in the context of other high density populations of breeding waders and suggests a need for regular monitoring of numbers and productivity, and also of changes in potential predators and their prey, to ensure their survival.

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Plate 247. Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*, adult female, the first British record of the subspecies. This specimen was collected as a tideline corpse on 19 January 1956, near Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, and is held by Bolton Museum (accession number INV:19160). The biometrics of the skin are shown in Table 2 (specimen number 13). © *National Museums Scotland*

The *polaris* subspecies of Little Auk *Alle alle* on the British List

C.J. MCINERNY & R.Y. MCGOWAN ON BEHALF OF BOURC

This paper describes the analysis of a number of Little Auk Alle alle *specimens collected in Scotland that show biometrics of the subspecies* A.a. polaris *which breeds in the eastern part of the species' Arctic range. Wing length measurements confirmed that two specimens are* A.a. polaris. *This conclusion has been accepted by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC), with an adult female collected from near Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland on 19 January 1956 identified as the first record for Britain (BOU 2018b).*

Little Auk world range and taxonomy

The Little Auk is a circumpolar species breeding through the summer in huge numbers on islands at high latitudes well above the Arctic Circle; indeed, it is the most abundant Arctic seabird (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Wojczulanis-Jacubas *et al.* 2015). During the winter the species disperses further south at sea, with the non-breeding range encompassing the North Atlantic and the North Sea. Variable numbers are seen each year in British coastal waters, particularly off Scotland (Brown & Grice 2005, Forrester *et al.* 2007). Occasionally, birds are wrecked after storms with corpses found on beaches; and live individuals sometimes appear far inland.

Little Auk comprises two subspecies. *A.a. alle*, hereafter 'nominate *alle*', breeds on east Baffin Island (Canada), Greenland, Iceland, Jan Mayen and Svalbard (both Norway) and Novaya Zemlya (Russia), and winters in the North Atlantic and North Sea. *A.a. polaris*, hereafter '*polaris*', breeds further east on Franz Josef Land and possibly Severnaya Zemlya (both Russia) east to St. Lawrence Island (Alaska), with wintering areas including the Barents Sea, and likely overlapping with nominate *alle* in the North Atlantic. Individuals of the two subspecies are separated by biometrics, specifically wing and bill lengths, with *polaris* greater in size than nominate *alle* (Stenhouse 1930, Stempniewicz *et al.* 1996, 2001).

In one study, Wojczulanis-Jacubas *et al.* (2015) found little genetic divergence between birds from populations of *polaris* and nominate *alle*. This resulted in a re-evaluation of their subspecific status, with the proposal that Little Auk should instead be regarded as a monotypic species, with *polaris* synonymised with nominate *alle*. This revised taxonomy was adopted by some authorities (e.g. BirdLife International 2017).

In contrast, other studies have revealed consistent phenological differences with both adults and nestlings of *polaris* being larger in size than nominate *alle* (Stempniewicz *et al.* 1996). Such biometric support for the subspecific status of *polaris* has been accepted by the *IOC World Bird List* (Gill & Donsker 2018) and del Hoyo *et al.* (1996). As the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has adopted the *IOC World Bird List* taxonomy (BOU 2018a) this conclusion is followed here in the context of the British List.

Individuals of the two subspecies are most readily distinguished by wing lengths measured from specimens prepared as skins. Birds having a wing length longer than 133 mm are *polaris*, and those with a wing length greater than 130 mm probably being *polaris* (Stempniewicz 1981, Cramp 1985). Birds with a wing length of 130 mm or shorter are nominate *alle*.

Bill length is less useful for separating the two subspecies, as some overlap occurs. Though the mean bill lengths from three populations of nominate *alle* are in the range of 15.8–16.1 mm, shorter than the *polaris* mean length of 17.0 mm, in both subspecies a range of 15.0–17.5 mm is observed (Cramp 1985, Stempniewicz 2001).

Table 1 reproduces the measurements of Little Auk specimens preserved as skins collected in Franz Josef Land, Russia published by Stenhouse (1930). This table lists ten specimens, including the holotype of *Alle alle polaris* Stenhouse (specimen number 4).

Table 1. Little Auk *Alle alle polaris* specimens collected in Franz Josef Land, Russia (from Stenhouse 1930). Specimen number 4 is the holotype for *Alle alle polaris* Stenhouse. Note that the wing length measurement of this skin was confirmed as 135 mm by BMcG as part of this review. NMS, National Museums Scotland.

				Biometrics (mm)					
						Bill			
	Collection locality	Gender; age	Date	Wing	Tarsus	Culmen	Height	Gonys to tip	Comment; citation; museum; museum accession number
1	Cape Flora	-	11 April 1895	130.0	23.5	17.0	10.0	6.0	Stenhouse (1930); NMS; (Z.1921.145.83)
2	Cape Flora	-	11 April 1895	131.0	23.0	17.0	10.0	6.0	Stenhouse (1930); NMS; (Z.1921.145.83d)
3	Cape Flora	Male; adult	5 April 1897	134.0	-	17.5	10.75	6.0	Mounted; Stenhouse (1930); NMS; (Z.1921.145.82)
4	Cape Flora	Female; adult	24 April 1897	135.0	22.0	17.1	10.5	6.0	HOLOTYPE; wing length on label 135 mm; published wing length 134 mm and culmen 17.5mm; BMcG confirmed wing length 135 mm and culmen 17.1; Stenhouse (1930); NMS; (Z.1899.30.12)
5	Cape Saulen	-	August 1899	129.5	23.5	17.5	11.0	6.5	Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum
6	Cape Saulen	Male; 2cy	20 August 1899	125.5	21.0	17.0	-	6.0	Un-moulted primaries; Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum
7	Cape Saulen	Male; adult	27 April 1900	136.0	24.0	17.0	11.0	7.0	Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum
8	Cape Saulen	Male; adult	20 June 1900	132.0	21.5	17.5	12.0	6.0	Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum
9	Cape Saulen	Male; adult	22 June 1900	132.5	23.5	17.0	10.5	6.5	Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum
10	Cape Saulen	Female; adult	22 June 1900	134.0	22.5	15.0	10.0	5.5	Stenhouse (1930); University of Turin, Natural Science Museum

Little Auk subspecies on the British List and *Scottish List*

Nominate *alle* is seen regularly in British waters as a winter visitor and as such is placed in Category A of both the British List and Scottish List (Forrester *et al.* 2007, BOU 2018a).

In contrast, *polaris* is a vagrant to British waters with just a handful of documented reports, all from Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Subspecies *polaris* was originally added to Category D of the British List (BOU 1991) on the basis of a male bird collected by Richard Meinertzhagen in the Firth of Forth on 21 January 1912 (specimen at Natural History Museum, Tring (accession number NHM 1965.M.4256)), and other tideline corpses, including two from Shetland, collected by S. Bruce and L. Gray in 1954 and 1956, and deposited at Bolton Museum, Greater Manchester (Hazelwood & Gorton 1956). However, all first records for Britain based on Meinertzhagen specimens were rejected following the likelihood of fraud (BOU 1993, Knox 1993). As a result, the earliest British record of *polaris* defaulted to the first tideline corpse from Shetland, a second-calendar-year female recovered at Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland on 5 January 1954, with the subspecies placed in Category D3, having 'only ever been found dead on the tideline'. In a subsequent revision of the British List, *polaris* was transferred inadvertently to Category A (BOU 2006), although this was later corrected by its removal, that action was accompanied with a stated intention by BOURC to review all claims of British records for the taxon (BOU 2009).

The following is the BOURC review of British records.

British records of *A.a. polaris*

Six records of *polaris*, all from Scotland, are listed in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), with no others published for the rest of the UK.

These are:

1954 Shetland, Lerwick, Mainland, female, second-calendar-year, 5 January, specimen at Bolton Museum (accession number INV:19158) (*Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 76: 107; *Ibis* 133: 439).

1956 Shetland, near Lerwick, Mainland, female, adult, 19 January, specimen at Bolton Museum (accession number INV:19160) (*Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club 76*: 107; *Ibis* 133: 439).

1966 Shetland, Norwick, Unst, found long dead, December (*Scottish Birds* 5: 105).

1990 North-east Scotland, between Scotstown and Rattray Head, unsexed, tideline corpse, specimen not retained, 29 April (*Scottish Bird News* 19: 3; *Ibis* 133: 439).

1991 Orkney, several birds found dead, 2 January (*Orkney Bird Report* 1991; *Scottish Bird Report* 1991: 46).

1997 Orkney, Orphir, Mainland, found dead, 10 December (*Orkney Bird Report* 1997; *Scottish Bird Report* 1997: 48).

The 1954 and 1956 Shetland specimens were tideline corpses, recovered with three other nominate *alle* Little Auks. BMcG arranged a loan of these five specimens from Bolton Museum for critical examination (Table 2). This also allowed direct comparison with other material, including the holotype of *polaris* held at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh (Table 1).

Table 2. Little Auk specimens collected on Mainland, Shetland, described in Hazelwood & Gorton (1956). Measurements by BMcG. Specimen number 13 is *polaris*, based on a wing length exceeding 133 mm, and is the first British record of the subspecies; see Plate 247. Specimen number 11 is also possibly *polaris* with a wing length of 128–129 mm; as the wing feathers are worn the true length may be equal to or exceed 131–132 mm. But specimen numbers 12, 14 and 15 are all nominate *alle* having shorter wings of 123–125 mm.

				Biometrics (mm)				
					Bill			
	Collection locality	Gender; age	Date	Wing	Tarsus	Culmen	Height	Gonys to tip	Comment; citation; museum; museum accession number
11	Lerwick	Female; 2cy	5 January 1954	128.0 (right) 129.0 (left)	24.0	-	-	6.0	Wing length on label 129 mm 'W 129'; published wing length 132 mm; BMcG confirmed wing lengths 128 mm (right) 129 (left); primary feather tips worn on both wings; Hazelwood & Gorton (1956); Bolton Museum; (INV:19158)
12	Sumburgh Light	Male; adult	12 January 1956	124.0	-	-	-	-	Wing length on label 124 mm 'W 124'; Bolton Museum
13	Near Lerwick	Female; adult	19 January 1956	135.0	23.0	16.5	9.3	6.1	Wing length on label 134 mm 'W 134'; published wing length 135 mm; BMcG confirmed wing length 135 mm; Hazelwood & Gorton (1956); Bolton Museum; (INV:19160)
14	Lerwick	Female; adult	1 February 1956	125.0	-	-	-	-	Bolton Museum
15	Lerwick	Female; adult	5 February 1956	123.0	-	-	-	-	Bolton Museum

Discussion of the 1954 and 1956 British records of *A.a. polaris*

The wing lengths of the five skins (specimen numbers 11–15) collected in Shetland during 1954 and 1956 are shown in Table 2.

1954. Specimen number 11 was assigned to *polaris* by Hazelwood & Gorton (1956) on the basis of a wing length of 132 mm, although with worn primaries. As such this individual, a second-calendar-year female, was designated the first British record (BOU 1993). However, the wing measurement was not replicated during this review. Instead, wing lengths of 128 mm (right) and 129 mm (left) were obtained, in agreement with that noted on the specimen label. Nevertheless, as described by Hazelwood & Gorton (1956), the primary feather tips are worn. Such wear could account for up to *c.* 3 mm of the longest primaries suggesting that the unabraded primary lengths are 131 mm and 132 mm, respectively. This would account for the 132 mm wing length published by Hazelwood & Gorton (1956). Accordingly, the specimen could be judged to meet the criterion for *polaris*.

1956. Specimen numbers 12, 14 and 15 have wing lengths below 130 mm confirming that they are nominate *alle*.

In contrast, specimen number 13, an adult female (Plate 247), has a wing length of 135 mm. This individual, collected on 19 January 1956 from near Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland has a wing length diagnostic of *polaris* being above the 133 mm size threshold for the subspecies. Its bill length of 16.5 mm is also consistent with *polaris*.

Discussion of the 1966, 1990, 1991 and 1997 British records of *A.a. polaris*

1966. A long dead corpse was retrieved by Frank J. Walker in December at Norwick, Unst, Shetland. This had a wing length of 127 mm which was interpreted to show 'a fair indication of...arctic origin' (Bourne 1968). Unfortunately, the method for measuring the wing was not recorded and the specimen was not preserved. The subspecific identification of this individual therefore cannot be determined.

1990. A tideline corpse was retrieved on 29 April between Scotstown and Rattray Head, North-east Scotland, part of wreck of up to 244 dead seabirds (Bourne 1990, BOU 1991). Although the specimen was not preserved, the wing length was recorded as 139 mm. On the basis of the described biometrics, this meets the criterion for *polaris*.

1991. Thirty-eight corpses were found on Scapa Bay beach, Mainland, Orkney on 2 January (*Orkney Bird Report* 1991), several with 'wing lengths in excess of usual Svalbard population and are attributed to *A.a. polaris*' (Murray 1993). A further 45 corpses were found at the same site on 9 and 11 January. Unfortunately, no measurements were published, so it is uncertain if any of these birds met the required criterion for *polaris*. Accordingly, the subspecific identification of these individuals cannot be determined.

1997. A single dead bird was found at Burray and Orphir, Mainland, Orkney on 10 December (*Orkney Bird Report* 1997) with 'biometrics of *A.a. polaris* from Franz Josef Land' (Murray 1999). Again, no measurement was published, and the subspecific identification of this individual cannot be determined.

Conclusions

Re-examination of specimens of Little Auks held at Bolton Museum has shown that an adult female collected on 19 January 1956 near Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland (accession number INV:19160) has a wing length of 135 mm. This measurement falls within the range indicative of *A.a. polaris*. As such it has been accepted as the first record of the taxon in Britain allowing

the subspecies to be added to Category A of the British List (BOU 2018b). A record from North-east Scotland in April 1990 has also been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) as the second British occurrence. No other published reports provided enough information to be confirmed.

These two accepted records show that Little Auks from the eastern extreme of the breeding range, nesting from Franz Josef Land (Russia) to St. Lawrence Island (Alaska), are present in the North Sea during the winter, and so aid mapping the non-breeding range of the subspecies *A.a. polaris*. However, it is important to emphasise that most Little Auks seen in Scottish and British waters are distant flying birds observed during land-based seawatches where wing lengths cannot be ascertained. It is possible therefore that *polaris* is under-recorded, with the taxon being more widespread and regular in Britain. Thus, it is hoped that the publication of this review will highlight *polaris* and its identification to observers. Fresh corpses of long-winged Little Auks should be forwarded to museums with natural history collections for preservation, as the key measurement is the wing length of prepared specimens as skins. Ideally, the whole corpse should be salvaged, but where this is impossible, the preservation of detached wings might suffice. Accumulated information on these occurrences would allow a more accurate picture of the incidence of *polaris* in Scotland and the rest of Britain, and so help to further define its global range during the non-breeding season.

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Plate 248. Red Kites and Buzzards, Argaty, Doune, Upper Forth, 9 January 2010. © *Argaty Red Kites*

High survival rates of radio-tagged Red Kites in central Scotland during extreme winter weather

K. DUFFY & D. CAMERON

Introduction

Red Kites *Milvus milvus* have been reintroduced to Scotland through a series of release projects since 1989, the population in central Scotland (Upper Forth and Perth & Kinross) having been established since 1996. A number of Red Kites were radio-tagged annually in most years between 1996 and 2011, initially as part of the reintroduction and subsequently for general monitoring purposes by RSPB Scotland. Since 2005, Red Kites were radio-tagged annually for a study on the effects of the Braes of Doune wind farm (Upper Forth) on the local Red Kite population carried out by Natural Research Projects Ltd (NRP), with RSPB Scotland also continuing monitoring. The two exceptionally cold winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 gave an opportunity to monitor Red Kite survival and behaviour during extreme conditions, the most severe since the population was re-established.

The effects of weather on the Red Kite population were outside the scope of the wind farm impact study but due to the large amount of data collected it was possible to investigate other aspects of the birds' biology. Some of the findings of the core study have already been published (Urquhart & Whitfield 2016).

Methods

Under BTO and SNH licenses, the study Red Kites were fitted with 22 g back-pack mounted radio-transmitters, attached with a harness of Teflon ribbon when the birds were nestlings. Tagging was carried out in a collaborative effort between NRP, RSPB Scotland and local raptor study groups.

In all years except 2008 the radio-tagged Red Kites were also fitted with patagial wing tags. These individuals were monitored on a weekly basis by NRP and RSPB Scotland staff both by routine radio-tracking work through the Braes of Doune study and by radio-tracking in the wider countryside (including roost monitoring) by vehicle.

The weather data used in this paper (Bielby 2010, 2011 & 2012) were collected from weather stations in Dunblane, Tyndrum and Killin, where records have been collected since 1995, 1991 and 2000 respectively. The general area covered by these weather stations coincided with much of the range of the central Scotland Red Kite population at that time, so the data are considered to give a good representation of the weather conditions within the Red Kites' range.

Results

Winter 2009/10

The winter of 2009/10 was widely regarded at the time as the most severe in decades. December was the coldest on record in Dunblane and coldest in Scotland since 1981. January was colder still, and taken together, the December/January period was the coldest in Scotland since records began in 1914. The mean January temperature was -0.8°C, 2.34°C below average (Bielby 2010, 2011).

A sample of radio-tagged Red Kites were present in central Scotland throughout the period of December 2009 to March 2010. This consisted of 22 individuals on 30 November 2009: 11 radio-tagged as nestlings in 2009, ten tagged as nestlings in 2008 and a second-year bird radio-tagged and released in summer 2009. The latter individual had been taken into captivity after being injured and was released when fully recovered.

Of the 22 birds present at the beginning of the cold weather in early December 2009, at least 20 (90.9%) were still alive and present in the core central Scotland area on 31 March 2010. One individual reared in 2008 'disappeared' soon after 17 December 2009. However, this bird had a faulty radio-transmitter for several months beforehand and it is probable that the transmitter had failed. The birds' transmitters had a posture sensor to determine if the bird was perched or flying and this had stopped working properly a year earlier, although the transmitter continued to broadcast an increasingly poor signal. Due to temporary changes in legislation, no wing tags were attached to central Scotland Red Kites in 2008, so had it been alive this bird could not have been identified subsequently. A second individual was found dead below a wind turbine at the Braes of Doune wind farm on 27 April 2010. As the remains may have been covered by snow for some time, it may have died in late March, having been last recorded alive on 12 March. Only the rear half of the bird was found, having been cut cleanly in two (a common feature of wind turbine fatalities) and so cause of death was not weather related. This was the only confirmed fatality of a study bird during this winter period.

Winter 2010/11

The low temperatures during this winter exceeded even those of the previous one although the coldest period was much earlier. Extremely low temperatures and extensive snow cover began in late November. The mean December temperature of -3.76°C was 5.47°C below the average for the area (Bielby 2011).

Radio-tracking coverage was less thorough in this period mainly due to difficulties in accessing the Braes of Doune study area and surrounding countryside which was covered in deep snow. More than 15 cm of snow was recorded by the authors on the track leading to the Braes of Doune wind farm study area in January with additional snow subsequently falling on that. This was at relatively low altitude (160 m above sea level) and snow depths on the wind farm study area itself were far deeper due to drifting. Fieldwork was further hampered by the field workers' vehicles (even 4x4s) being snowed in for long periods.

Nevertheless, it was possible to get some coverage across the wider countryside over the period. Seventeen birds (seven tagged as nestlings in 2008 and ten tagged as nestlings in 2009) from the original sample of 22 were still present with functioning radio-transmitters at the end of October 2010. Of these, 16 survived the cold snap and were recorded in January 2011 and beyond. The 17th bird, tagged in 2008, survived until at least mid-January 2011, when the weather turned less severe. By February, the weather had changed dramatically and was milder than average (Bielby 2012), but the transmitters from the 2008 cohort were starting to fail and so the fate of the 17th bird could not be determined with certainty. If this bird had succumbed due to cold weather, survival still remained high at 94.1%.

Discussion

One suggestion as to why the Red Kites' survival was so high in such harsh weather conditions is the presence of the feeding station based at Argaty, Doune (Upper Forth). The site, opened in 2003 has a purpose-built hide where visitors can see the birds at close hand coming to food provided on a daily basis (McDonnell 2011).

Contrary to what many people may expect, the feeding station was only infrequently attended by most of the study birds during the most severe weather in 2009/10. Few study birds roosted in the Doune/Argaty area (Table 1), with the majority roosting further north in Perthshire. However, other untagged Red Kites were present at Argaty where supplemental feeding was continued through the harshest weather (M. McDonnell pers. comm.). This pattern of reduced attendance at the feeding station and at Argaty roosts had started to emerge in juvenile Red Kites as early as 2004 as the breeding range expanded both in Stirling District and Perthshire (RSPB Scotland 2005, 2006).

It is possible that some tagged individuals did feed at the site before roosting elsewhere but the birds that were in the area at feeding time (14:00 hrs in winter) showed a strong tendency to roost there and the Red Kites rarely moved long distances late in the day.

Table 1. Number of radio-tagged study Red Kites roosting in the Argaty area (Upper Forth) during the winter of 2009/10.

Month	November		December				January		February	March
Date	20th	25th	2nd	8th	15th	16th	5th	13th	16th	21st
Sample	22	22	22	22	21	21	21	21	21	21
Number	5	5	0	2	0	4	0	0	5	4
%	22.7	22.7	0.0	9.1	0.0	19.0	0.0	0.0	23.8	19.0

Although coverage was less complete in the 2010/11 cold snap, only two of the 17 tagged individuals were regularly tracked in the general area of Doune and the Argaty feeding station. The other study birds remained further north in Perthshire. Records from this study and from the RSPB Scotland Red Kite database showed that at least 75% of the radio-tagged juvenile Red Kites were roosting in the main roosts in Perthshire (RSPB Scotland 2005, 2006).

Conclusions

This work suggests that even extreme winter weather is not a significant cause of mortality in Red Kites and this further underlines the fact that human factors, primarily illegal persecution provide the only real limit to the species' establishment and population growth in Scotland.

Although the natural distribution of Red Kites extends as far north as southern Sweden (where there is a small resident population), the birds are largely migratory in the north of their range (Carter 2007). The central Scotland Red Kite population was originally derived from released birds imported from Germany, although there has been genetic input from other areas, particularly the Swedish-derived north Scotland population (Carter *et al.* 2003). As the German population is largely migratory in winter, a genetic explanation for high resilience to such conditions is not necessarily the obvious one.

We do not suggest that mortality under such conditions did not occur. At least two individuals which were not radio-tagged were found dead in the 2010/11 winter, a bird bred in 2009 and one bred in 2010. Both were found near Argaty frozen solid and were emaciated (M. McDonnell pers. comm.). Another Red Kite was killed by a turbine strike on 1 November 2010, although there was no suggestion that extreme weather played a role in this fatality. These examples do not contradict the finding that the overall survival of the study birds and therefore presumably the wider population, was encouragingly high.

As prolonged snow cover made small animals inaccessible and much carrion buried or frozen solid, it does beg the question what the birds were actually feeding on. One of the authors witnessed a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* feeding on a Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* carcass that was frozen solid during one of the severe winter periods. It is very probable that Red Kites were able to ingest similarly frozen meat in the same manner.

The apparent low level of use of the Argaty feeding station by the study birds in exceptionally severe weather is further evidence against the sometimes-expressed opinions that feeding stations have a negative effect on Red Kite populations by inhibiting population expansion and creating dependence on artificial feeding.

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Plate 249. The male Honey-buzzard '*Crail*' at the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1) Territory 4, 20 July 2018. This bird was a presumed non-breeder as it was not seen to associate with any particular territory. © *John Anderson*

Honey-buzzards in central Scotland during 2018 - a different breeding year

C.J. MCINERNY, K.D. SHAW, K. HOEY, A. LITTLE, K. LITTLE, K. GIBB, B. KERR & J.S. NADIN

We have been studying Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in central Scotland for a number of years. These studies have revealed two distinct and separate breeding populations, one in east central Scotland (Study Area 1 - SA1), and the other in west central Scotland (Study Area 2 - SA2) (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny & Shaw 2018a, McInerny & Shaw 2018b). During the 2017 breeding season, SA1 supported up to nine territories holding a minimum of 30 birds including up to 18 breeders, at least five non-breeders and 7–8 juveniles; SA2 contained 2–3 territories and up to nine birds, including up to six breeders, two non-breeders and one juvenile; a scattering of pairs were detected elsewhere in the region (McInerny *et al.* 2018).

Here we describe the results of continued monitoring of Honey-buzzards in central Scotland during the 2018 breeding season, which revealed a very different year to both 2017 and 2016. A team of observers collaborated to study the two populations from mid-May to mid-September using similar methods and coverage to those used during the 2017 season (McInerny *et al.* 2018). In total, *c.* 1,261 observer hours were completed at SA1, and *c.* 310 hours at SA2. Two new study areas, one in 'central' central Scotland (Study Area 3 - SA3) and another in south-east central Scotland (Study Area 4 - SA4), were also monitored with *c.* 92 and *c.* 74 observer hours, respectively.

Study Area 1 (SA1) - east central Scotland

The first male was observed on 21 May, although the wing-clapping display was not seen on this day; and the first female, with a male, was recorded on 5 June. Birds appeared to arrive later, were less visible, and performed little wing clapping during May and June, compared with 2017 (McInerny & Shaw 2018a).

However, individual birds returning from previous years were identified by plumage detail including '*Orangetail*', '*Plain John*', '*Shakespeare*', '*Shorty*', '*Whitespot*' and '*Whiteshaft*' (McInerny *et al.* 2018, K.D. Shaw, C.J. McInerny, K. Gibb, K. Hoey in prep.). '*Kirkcaldy*', a male, was named for the first time, being recognised from the 2016 season (Plate 7 in Shaw *et al.* 2017).

New birds were also identified. These included a breeding male '*Turnberry*' in Territory 4 (see front cover), and a breeding female '*Bournville*', the latter the partner of the male '*Shorty*' in Territory 5 (McInerny *et al.* 2018). At least seven new presumed non-breeders were also named such as '*Crail*' (Plate 249) and '*Crosshill*'. '*Crosshill*', a female, wing clapped over 300 times in 55 minutes while flying above multiple territories on 24 July, the behaviour of a non-breeding bird.

A reduced number of active territories were observed in 2018 compared with 2017. Five active territories were identified, producing at least seven juveniles. Birds were seen at another two territories, but there was no evidence of breeding. '*Whitespot*' and '*Whiteshaft*' from 2017 returned to Territory 3 (McInerny *et al.* 2018), but were judged failed breeders due to their behaviour. In another four territories birds were not observed despite many hours of observations leading to the conclusion that the pairs had not established during 2018.

However, importantly, in collaboration with Forest Enterprise Scotland, a nest was located in central Scotland for the first time. This was on 7 August, of the pair '*Shorty*' and '*Bournville*' in Territory 5 (McInerny *et al.* 2018). This pair produced two young, which were observed perching on branches near to the nest through August (Plate 250). Many food items were found on the ground near the nest (Plate 251a–b).

The first juveniles were seen flying away from nests on 27 August. The last adult was noted on 4 September, and the last juveniles on 9 September, when 2–3 were observed.

In total, during 2018, SA1 supported up to ten breeders, at least seven non-breeders, two failed breeders, and at least seven juveniles.

Study Area 2 (SA2) - west central Scotland

The male '*Malta*' was first observed on 24 May, wing clapping 22 times over the same Territory A that he occupied in 2017 (McInerny *et al.* 2018). He was joined by the 2017 female '*Sicily*' on 2 June, when both were seen to fly together. No other Honey-buzzards were observed during 2018 at SA2, with '*Malta*' less visible and wing clapping far less than in 2017.

'*Malta*' and '*Sicily*' (Plates 252–254) were observed up to 12 August, but no evidence for an active nest with young at SA2 was observed,

Plate 250. The nest of *'Shorty'* and *'Bournville'* at the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1) Territory 5, 23 August 2018. Two juvenile Honey-buzzards are visible, one with pale underparts and the other dark. © *Gareth Mason*. Nest monitoring and photographs were taken with a Schedule 1 licence issued by SNH.

Plate 251 (a–d). Food items of Honey-buzzards in central Scotland. Common Frog *Rana temporaria* (a) and wasp (Hymenoptera) comb (b) found beneath the nest of '*Shorty*' and '*Bournville*' at the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1) Territory 5, August 2018. © Gareth Mason and John Nadin. A wasp nest in Territory A of '*Malta*' and '*Sicily*' at the west central Scotland Study Area (SA2), before (c) 30 July 2018, and after predation (d) 11 August 2018. © *Keith Hoey*

with it inferred that they failed to breed. However, '*Malta*' was noted associating with Territory A through August (Plate 254), until the 30 August when he wing clapped seven times. A bird, possibly '*Malta*', was seen on 2 September. Such late dates for an adult on territory implies that juveniles may have been present, but this was not confirmed as none were seen despite much searching.

Study Area 3 (SA3) - 'central' central Scotland, and Study Area 4 (SA4) - south-east central Scotland

Two new study areas were monitored in 2018: SA3 in 'central' central Scotland and SA4 in south-east central Scotland. They contain similar habitat to that present in SA1 and SA2, and Honey-buzzards had been noted in both during previous years (McInerny *et al.* 2018).

SA3: the first Honey-buzzard of the year in all of central Scotland was observed on 12 May in SA3. It displayed on this day and on 16 May, and was also seen at the same location on 17 and 28 May. This extended presence suggested that it was a male establishing a territory. However, it was not seen later in the year, so the breeding outcome was unknown. One other bird was noted elsewhere in SA3 on 30 June.

SA4: no birds were seen in May, June or July, with just one observation of a female on 15 August.

Discussion

A number of differences were noted at SA1 and SA2 during 2018, compared with 2017 and 2016. Birds appeared later on territories after spring migration, with less wing clapping display observed. These two observations may be linked: the late arrival of males (possibly due to meteorological conditions along the long migration route from West Africa) coincident with the arrival of females may have induced birds to pair up and nest build more quickly, without the need for males to display.

Fewer active territories were noted at both study areas with, consequently, fewer juveniles produced. This was surprising as the hot, dry and settled 'continental-like' spring and summer of 2018 in Scotland should have allowed a successful breeding season. There are several possible reasons for this. Adverse meteorological conditions during spring migration may have not only delayed but even prevented the arrival of birds. The dry spring may have made it difficult for birds to locate amphibians, which are important part of the species' diet (Plate 251a) (Appleby 2012). The observed increase in Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* in the study areas may be significant (Plate 255), as this species is thought to limit Honey-buzzards populations (Selås 1997, Gamauf *et al.* 2013). Other Honey-buzzard populations studied elsewhere in the UK have shown variations in the number of pairs and territories over the years and decades (Roberts & Law 2014, Harwood & Richman 2016).

Plates 252–253 (top). The female Honey-buzzard '*Sicily*' at the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2) Territory A, 11 August 2018. **Plate 254 (bottom).** The male Honey-buzzard '*Malta*' at the west central Scotland Study Area 2 (SA2) Territory A, 11 August 2018. Though he and his partner '*Sicily*' associated with the territory until mid-August, with him remaining to the end of the month, no evidence for an active nest was noted and juvenile Honey-buzzards were not observed. © *All Keith Hoey*

Plate 255. A juvenile female Goshawk at the east central Scotland Study Area 1 (SA1) Territory 2, 29 August 2018. Studies elsewhere in Europe have shown that Honey-buzzards avoid Goshawks when choosing nest sites, and that Goshawks limit Honey-buzzard populations (Selås 1997, Gamauf *et al.* 2013). Juvenile Goshawks, especially females, have been observed harassing adult Honey-buzzards in the central Scotland study areas on multiple occasions. © *Kris Gibb*

We plan to continue monitoring Honey-buzzards in the four study areas during 2019. This will focus on three aspects:

- Extending the work to map the other species of birds of prey present and their interactions with Honey-buzzards. These include Goshawk (Plate 255), Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* and Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*, Thirteen species have now been recorded, making the study areas some of the richest sites in Scotland and the UK for raptors.
- Our continuing efforts to estimate the total Honey-buzzard population in central Scotland.
- To develop techniques in identifying individual Honey-buzzards to aid their study (K.D. Shaw, C.J. McInerny, K. Gibb, K. Hoey in prep.).

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Plate 256. Avocet family, Skinflats, Upper Forth, June 2018. © *Debbie Johnston*

Avocets successfully breeding in Upper Forth in 2018 - a first for Scotland

A. LEONARD

A pair of Avocets fledged three chicks at RSPB Scotland Skinflats (Upper Forth) in 2018, which is the first time Avocets have been recorded breeding successfully in Scotland.

These charismatic black-and-white waders only returned to southern England in the 1940s after being absent from the UK for a century. Since their re-colonisation in East Anglia, their population has been increasing, rising from 149 breeding pairs in 1973 (Sharrock *et al.* 1975) to at least 2,230 pairs in 2016 (Holling *et al.* 2018). They've also been expanding their range northwards, reaching RSPB Blacktoft Sands in East Yorkshire by the mid-1990s, County Durham in 2006, and then Northumberland in 2011, where the population had reached seven pairs by 2015 (Holling *et al.* 2017). RSPB Scotland Loch of Strathbeg in North-east Scotland had a displaying pair in April 2006 and a pair that made a nest scrape in 2008, but no eggs were laid (per RBBP). Single birds and pairs have been recorded there in most years since, but none have bred.

The birds were first seen at Skinflats in early spring feeding on the mudflats. Single birds had been spotted at the reserve several times before, but never two at once. They weren't expected to remain for long, but after regular sightings over several days, a local birder reported that he had seen them mating and scraping out a nest. The first spot they'd picked was very vulnerable, but they moved to a better location on one of the islands in the lagoons.

In early May, the Avocets were regularly seen harassing the local Shelducks, Oystercatchers and anything else that got too close, which indicated they were definitely on a nest. We were then able to confirm that they'd laid four eggs. It was a tense few weeks waiting to see if they would be successful, but the pair proved to be excellent parents and fledged three chicks at the start of July.

Avocets are a highly protected species, being listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, and very sensitive to disturbance, so the breeding attempt was kept secret to try to keep visitor numbers to an absolute minimum. Skinflats is a very open site, and there are no hides or even bushes to screen people, so it was almost impossible to remain unseen. But it's also a non-publicised reserve with limited access and no facilities, so fortunately visitor numbers are usually low anyway.

It may be that this attempt is the first step towards Avocets colonising the Firth of Forth, and indeed Scotland, but they're hard birds to predict. This lone pair were breeding on the very edge of their range, and so the fact that they fledged three chicks is actually quite remarkable. Whether they will return in 2019 remains to be seen, but a second pair was also seen prospecting another site in the Forth in 2018, so it may just be a matter of time before they become regular breeders in Scotland.

Plates 257–259. Avocet family, Skinflats, Upper Forth, June–July 2018. © (top) *Agnes Thompson,* (bottom left) *Debbie Johnston,* (bottom right) *Ron Penn*

Plate 260. Juvenile Avocets, Skinflats, Upper Forth, 1 July 2018. © *Ron Penn*

If you are considering a visit to Skinflats, we would kindly request that you park in the car park just off the Higgins' Neuk roundabout by the Kincardine Bridge at NS919868 and then walk south along the edge of the saltmarsh onto the RSPB site. This is a recognised right of way, and will help to avoid any issues with parking on site and disturbance to our neighbours.

Thanks to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel for information regarding previous breeding attempts.

Avocets are a Schedule 1 species and therefore a license is required to carry out any activities which may cause disturbance to the nesting birds, including photography. The photographs included in this article were taken from a distance which did not cause any disturbance to the birds.

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Black-headed Gull scavenging Meadow Pipit

On 6 July 2018, at 06:30 hrs, while driving south on the B709 towards Innerleithen (Borders), I stopped my car just north of The Piper's Grave (370 m above sea level) to observe through binoculars an adult Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* standing in the middle of the road, to see if it was colour-ringed (it wasn't).

However, the bird dashed to the roadside verge and returned to the carriageway carrying an item in its beak. I identified this as a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis,* probably a juvenile from its dark plumage and the fact that there were several loose flocks on post-fledging dispersal along the roadside. The pipit seemed lifeless, but fresh and intact, and had probably been killed fairly recently by a passing vehicle.

The gull shook the corpse a couple of times and tried to swallow it, but failed. However, a second attempt was partially successful, but the gull remained standing in the middle of the road with about a third of the pipit's rear-end still protruding from its bill. Eventually, the entire pipit was swallowed whole, the gull taking a few steps whilst doing this (to aid swallowing?) before taking off at the approach of a car, but still with a noticeable bulge in its throat.

Cramp (1985) mentions that Black-headed Gulls take birds mainly as carrion, or in a weakened state (hirundines). Prey is swallowed whole, manipulated, shaken, and sometimes broken up with pieces being torn off.

It is no surprise, therefore, that a presumed roadkill bird was consumed, but it may be of note that the species was identified, as was the manner of its consumption, and that Meadow Pipit can be swallowed whole by a small gull species.

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Letter to *Scottish Birds*

I read the recent short note on a Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* (Andrews 2018) eating a fish off Musselburgh with interest. In March 1994, on an artificial brackish lagoon at Culterty Field Station on the Ythan, North-east Scotland, I watched a male Long-tailed Duck dive and catch a European Eel *Anguilla anguilla* about 25 cm long, which it swallowed (Cosgrove 1997). The occurrence followed a prolonged period of bad weather which culminated in the deaths of several thousand seabirds in the North Sea. The Long-tailed Duck was subsequently seen briefly on two other dates and appeared to fly strongly. Perhaps fish appear more regularly in their diet than is reported?

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SOC Conference, October 2018, Macdonald Aviemore Resort

The forecast of colder weekend weather was confirmed as blizzards swept through the Drumochter Pass, and Aviemore lay under a grim blanket of grey. However, after some initial bewilderment between the locations of conference centre and our accommodation, delegates were soon established in their rooms and dining well in the bright and spacious restaurant. After a general welcome by SOC President, James Main, the audience settled down to receive the first lecture.

Plate 361. Pete Cairns. © *David Palmar / www.photoscot.co.uk*

Scotland: The Big Picture - Pete Cairns

To a backdrop of stunning pictures and video, Pete's inspirational lecture reminded us of the familiar idea, that "wild" areas are not really wild. We need to look behind the supposedly wild to see the impoverished nature of man-made or man-influenced landscapes with their loss of biodiversity. Aldo Leopold coined the term "thinking like a mountain" for a holistic view of the ecosystem, and recognised that apex predators and the tiniest of insects play a vital role. Pete also quoted wildlife and conservation writer Doug Chadwick as saying "the essence of nature is wholeness".

He asked "What should Scotland look like?" describing the wholeness as still broken and asserting that we need to think beyond saving simply the fragments of land called nature reserves.

Rewilding is allowing nature to do its own thing, not simply reintroducing apex predators. We may not want to live with the Lynx and the Wolf, but we have, like 24 European countries, reintroduced the Beaver. Rewilding is a shift of mindset. Connectivity and wildlife corridors are essential.

Rewilding should be an opportunity, not a threat. It is happening bit by bit, as in 'Cairngorms Connect', a 200-year project, involving trees and their neighbours. Forests are complex communities constantly evolving. Nature, such as the Capercaillie, is being allowed to recover.

Rewilding is a philosophical journey, which should bring jobs for young people and community involvement. Adding forest slowly, allowing regeneration and transformation into a living forest, as in Glen Affric, where it is revitalising the local economy, Creag Meagaidh, Coigach, Assynt, Carrifran Wildwood, and even in the lowlands, Cumbernauld Living Landscape should bring a new dawn full of potential for humans and wildlife.

In a wider context, we shouldn't forget marine rewilding - Scottish waters are capable of supporting apex predators such as Killer Whales. Internationally, wild animals are in decline across the world. Benefits of the natural environment include flood prevention, reversal of rural depopulation, and preservation of clean air and fresh water on which we are dependent for our health. Scotland could become a world leader in rewilding. Can we afford not to rewild?

David Palmar

The evening continued with the annual quiz, this time directed by Wendy Hicks. Each table had several sheets of teasing questions. These ranged from pictorial snippets from famous logos to silhouettes of all the British raptors. The variety of questions was designed to involve everyone and there were many discussions, arguments and much loud merriment on all sides. As usual, this light ending to the first evening was an ideal social start to the conference weekend.

SATURDAY

Early morning mist soon gave way to sunshine, although pathways around the Centre remained quite ice-bound. A selection of walks had been arranged by Highland Branch and BTO Scotland to visit bird-rich areas, but the upper Cairngorms had to be omitted due to the very wild, frosty conditions. Desmond Dugan, David Jarett and Peter Gordon led visits to the lower level pinewoods of Glenmore, Loch an Eilein and Inshriach, all providing good birding for the early breakfasters with six Capercaillies, Crossbills and Crested Tit all seen. Contrasting highlights were a distant Golden Eagle and a Wood Mouse, the latter running up a tree, then freezing to allow close study and photos.

The later local walk, led by Alex Joss, turned out to be a really extensive tour around Craigellachie NNR and the 'Aviemore Orbital', introducing most of us to woodland areas hitherto unknown, with good viewing of all the local species including Woodcock, Jays, Fieldfares, Redwings and high-flying Whooper Swans. Many thanks to all the Highland branch members who led the various parties.

Plate 362. Setting out on ice. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

In the afternoon, the lectures continued...

City living: gardens, birds and the built environment - Mike Toms

Mike Toms, from the BTO, explained how birds use the urban environment, including the risks they face and opportunities they exploit, based on 25–30 years of work on gardens, with data from the BTO's Garden Birdwatch scheme and the Breeding Bird Survey.

Changes in the urban environment are likely to impact significantly on species such as House Sparrows and Starlings because such a large proportion of their populations live in our towns and cities. For example, changes in building regulations have limited nesting opportunities.

Data submitted through Garden Birdwatch has allowed for analysis of trends, such as peaks and troughs in the reporting rates for Coal Tits in relation to the availability of Sitka Spruce as a food source. It has also been important in analysing the occurrence and spread of disease, such as Trichomoniasis in Greenfinches and Chaffinches and avian pox in Great Tit.

Plate 363. Mike Toms. © *David Palmar*

Work on Blackcaps has shown that our wintering birds, mainly present in the south-west of the UK, are European birds migrating to us for the winter. It has been found that wintering with us increases their productivity during the breeding season when they return to Europe. Analysis of temperature and food availability between years shows that Blackcaps are most likely to occur where food is regularly provided and where the garden is warmer. So, food and climate together have enabled Blackcaps to evolve a new migration strategy.

We now know urban green space is important. Supplementary food improves over-winter survival, buildings provide nesting opportunities and cities can be warmer. However, there are risks with increasing pollution and of birds flying into buildings.

Mike finished his talk with a look at Singapore with its 72 ha of rooftop gardens and 3,347 ha of nature reserves, highlighting the need for us to continue the research into the impacts of making changes in our cities and ensuring a better environment for our wildlife.

Alison Creamer

What are the impacts of woodland creation on biodiversity? - Eilidh McNab

Eilidh is in the third year of her PhD at Stirling University and sits on the Central Scotland branch committee. She described her work on the effects of the creation of large-scale native woodland on biodiversity. As was discussed in the introductory talk of the conference by Pete Cairns, there is a general conservation appetite for rewilding within Scotland, with much of this taking the form of upland woodland regeneration over existing heather moorland or upland grazing. Eilidh is looking at the impacts of this on biodiversity in general; as with all things there is the potential for species losses as well as gains.

In setting the scene, Eilidh discussed the benefits of woodland including for recreation, soil stability and as a resource for commercial forestry. Forests also provide a refuge and foraging resource for many animals, including birds, but then so do open habitats, for birds such as Meadow Pipit, Skylark and Golden Eagle. Previous studies have demonstrated the pattern of decreases in Meadow Pipit numbers and increases in woodland species at Carrifran Wildwood. New native woodland led to an increase in Black Grouse numbers within Perthshire between 2002 and 2012. Studies on breeding moorland waders showed that they would avoid areas of plantation forestry, potentially as this would lead to increased numbers of predators such as foxes and corvids.

Eilidh's field research has been undertaken across the Trossachs in mixed and broadleaved woodlands between two and 26 years old, and mature woodland. Early results have thrown up some interesting trends, such as the highest densities of Meadow Pipits being recorded within six-year-old woodland (higher than in open ground). Other results fit with expectations - Willow Warbler densities were always highest within woodland, as opposed to outside woodland. Her results going forward will be interesting to see, particularly as this is an area of potential conservation conflict.

Danny Oliver

Plate 364. Eilidh McNab. © *David Palmar*

Scottish Raptor re-introductions: success, challenges and progress - Andrew Stevenson

Andrew has been involved in the raptor field for many years and in his talk he outlined the re-introduction of large raptors which has taken place in the Scottish countryside recently. It has proved to be a very complex, high-profile and controversial process. The initial policy development involved producing a code for translocation covering licensing, ecological assessments, and even exit strategies if things had not gone well. A Scottish code for translocation was produced in 2014.

The species covered by Andrew were Goshawk, White-tailed Eagle, Red Kite and Golden Eagle. It is an expensive and time-consuming business with funding needed, not just for the setting up of the scheme, but also for the long-term monitoring and the use of techniques such as satellite tagging.

Plate 365. Andrew Stevenson. © *David Palmar*

The last decade has seen a rapid growth in Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle populations but not without some conflict difficulties. For example, there are agricultural conflicts with the White-tailed Eagles and perceived predation on lambs but a National Action Plan produced in 2014 has gone a long way to reducing tensions. The Red Kite expansion comes despite being slowed by persecution especially in the north Scotland population. The value to local rural economies of visitor attraction was emphasised with the Isle of Mull being cited as a good example.

Re-introductions continue. The South Scotland Golden Eagle Project aims to re-establish self-sustaining populations in areas where in the past their presence enhanced the upland skyline. Andrew's presentation was well illustrated and his comprehensive coverage of the subject was well received.

Gordon Riddle

From sludge to incineration: the story of Beddington, the last sewage farm

- Derek Coleman

Sewage farms, once a widespread solution to our foul waste disposal, have been superseded by sewage treatment works, resulting in habitat changes. Derek emphasised how different bird species have adapted to these changes, using the example of Beddington in urban south London. The 400-acre site supported diverse and often regionally important bird populations under various forms of sewage treatment for over a century. Areas were periodically flooded, providing pools, channels, islands and vegetation supporting diverse insect life and seeds for birds. Tree Sparrows benefitted with 8,790 juveniles ringed between 1992 and 2018. Other notable birds at Beddington have included Yellow Wagtail, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Green Sandpiper. Wintering populations have included 5,000 Snipe recorded in 1962 and 64 Jack Snipe in 1955.

More modern mechanical methods of sewage treatment destroyed the previous mosaic of habitats and resulted in an overall decline in species. Gravel extraction and landfill then became the main land uses at Beddington, attracting 20,000 gulls including Iceland, Glaucous and Caspian. Following this period, site restoration resulted in a landscape of lakes and islands, attracting dabbling duck and other water birds. Tree Sparrows fared less well, falling from previous levels to nine pairs in 2013 and only two pairs in 2018. Factors have included the loss of sludge beds for feeding and the cold winter of 2012/13 and mitigating measures have been taken, with 26 young fledged this year.

Plate 366. Derek Coleman. © *David Palmar*

The story of Beddington is one of birds adapting to the urban environments we create and of their resilience and opportunism in using often unpromising resources. It emphasises how, with care and awareness, we can support urban bird populations.

Hilary Maxfield

SOC 82nd AGM

SOC President James Main started proceedings with the minutes of the 81st AGM held on 21 October 2017 and the Annual Report, both proposed and seconded. Honorary SOC Treasurer, Andrew Thorpe, then presented an overview of the Annual Accounts. Under Income, £1605 from the old 200 Club was taken into the general account, subscriptions were raised with no noticeable financial dip, commissions from art sales at Waterston House raised £33,000 and legacies amounted to £35,000. Under Expenditure, staff salaries were reviewed and staff roles redefined and new ones created. The Club website was also developed, and overall, a £26,000 deficit occurred. However, Andrew reassured us that the Club is in good financial and staffing condition and has a sound investment scene. There are ongoing discussions with investment advisors regarding ethical investments.

In proposed amendments to the SOC Constitution, as detailed in the Annual Report circulated with the September issue of *Scottish Birds*, the AGM approved the appointment of Jeremy Wilson as Vice-President Birding and Science, and Lesley Creamer as Vice-President Management and Infrastructure. James Main thanked all the SOC staff, the strategy groups and members of Council for all their hard work. He then introduced Dr Ian Bainbridge as the new SOC President to applause from the audience. Ian thanked James for all his work as SOC President and also for the fact that he had sacrificed the timing of his Golden Wedding anniversary to be at the Conference. He greatly looked forward to his future work within the Club.

Conference dinner

This was a most enjoyable meal, served by a diligent waiting staff. At the end, the after-dinner speech was given by Zul Batia. This was not the usual type of address but started with a frank appraisal of the SOC's paucity of young members. He outlined a proposed plan to gather a number of active young people together to brainstorm this situation, in an attempt to rectify the age balance. He then introduced 14-year-old Michael Sinclair as an extremely active youngster in Clyde SOC branch and proceeded to chat with him about his achievements and his passion for birding and wildlife (Plate 367). The audience was genuinely taken with his assurance, variety of experience and initiatives. A 13-year-old, Holly Gillibrand from Highland branch was then brought forward to join in the discussion. She likewise spoke with clarity and assurance, mentioning her climb up Ben Nevis for charity. Also present was fellow junior Lucy Purbrick, the youngest attendee from last year. There was a distinct feeling of hope resonating among the delegates and congratulations are due to Zul for facilitating this lively exchange. The ceilidh followed to the driving beat of the band Cutting Edge from Dundee. The usual dances were duly practised and enjoyed, much to the pleasure of the older, more static members there.

Plate 367. Holly Gillibrand, Zul Batia and Michael Sinclair. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

SUNDAY

The loss of our boreal pinewoods - Ron Summers

Jeremy Wilson introduced Ron Summers as a 'well-kent face' in Scottish ornithology. Ron's talk certainly illustrated his depth of knowledge of pinewoods - and their birds. Ron explained that Scotland was once a wooded country and part of the coniferous band that covered much of Northern Europe, Asia and North America, and he illustrated how it might have looked then.

Scotland now has very small areas of original pinewood left, mainly in Strathspey and Deeside. There are two theories why the woods largely disappeared - either because of weather change or farmers felling the trees.

Ron put the Caledonian pinewoods in context. They had been there for 8,500 years and he gave examples of how present-day scientists have put an age to tree remnants and sunken logs. The original pinewoods had healthy undergrowth while some of the more recently planted woods have no ground cover, which has an effect on insects and hence the birds. The remaining Caledonian pinewoods hold slightly more species than other pinewoods but the density of certain species - particularly the Crested Tit is much higher. Ron showed an example of how birds utilised the older/dead trees with a picture of a Swift at an old woodpecker nest. He said that Capercaillie particularly liked the old Caledonian pinewoods as did Redstarts and Tree Pipits.

At the Rio Summit in 1992, the UK government pledged to increase the current Caledonian woodlands by 35% by 2005. Recent reports suggest that this pledge has, sadly, dropped off the government's radar. Ron said there were other initiatives like Cairngorms Connect which aims to expand the existing ancient pinewoods - naturally - and join them up. Biodiversity would increase, including the number of species and density of birds.

Against that, climate change may lead to pinewoods disappearing from Scotland by the end of the 21st century - so no Capercaillie or Crested Tits!

He concluded on this note of uncertainty and added that the young guys in the audience would have to deal with likely changes to the environment in the future.

Doreen Main

Bringing people, science and conservation together - the Glasgow House Sparrow Project - Kat Jones and Ross McLeod

The Glasgow House Sparrow Project started as a collaboration between RSPB Scotland and the University of Glasgow's Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, with help from teams of students and volunteers. The question asked is why are House Sparrows declining? In the UK the numbers are down by 70% although they are still a common species. There was a lot of goodwill for the project as sparrows are so popular and a press release had an excellent response.

Dr Hamish Leith kept diaries in the 1940s and 1950s with anecdotes about the number of House Sparrows in Glasgow. The project looked at Glasgow from a bird's point of view with the city having 32% of green space. The team ringed House Sparrows in Partick and found 85% re-sighting of them in the same garden.

Plate 368. Ron Summers chatting with Claudia Caporusso. © *David Palmar*

Plate 369. Kat Jones. © *David Palmar*

There are some one-offs with birds flying 2.8 and 2.5 km to Maryhill.

In some ways, urban sites are more difficult to manage than nature reserves and a different approach is required namely citizen science. A simple but scientifically rigorous survey was designed which took place in spring, early summer and late summer.

The questions asked were how many birds were seen (juveniles were counted as females), evidence of nesting, food availability, and cover from predators. The surveys were returned to the RSPB where volunteers collated the data.

The results showed 121 colonies across Greater Glasgow. Every survey area had House Sparrows in it but they were lacking in many gardens and streets. The gardens with House Sparrows had high dense cover with hedges more than waist high. A House Sparrow project in London showed one reason for a reduction in House Sparrows was a lack of invertebrates for fledglings. Work has been undertaken in Govan to encourage the creation of environments suitable for sparrows in schools, hospitals and care homes. School planning workshops have been successful with pupils developing House Sparrow friendly areas. Survey results will help future planning with advice on hedges, wild areas, feeding and putting up nest boxes.

Plate 370. Ross McLeod. © *David Palmar*

There is a House Sparrow quiz designed to verify data given by volunteers and an app to encourage creating suitable conditions for House Sparrows.

More information is available at: www.housesparrowscience.com

Gillian Herbert

Time for Tea and Coffee a last chance to visit the now traditional book stalls, society stands and wildlife photograph displays.

Birds, bats and beasties - 40 years of offshore recording - **Andrew Thorpe**

His 20 years as recorder for a club 40 years old in 2019 has given Andrew an excellent insight into offshore migrants reported from platforms and vessels in the northern North Sea. He began his talk with a 'hot-off-the-press' report of a Barn Owl off Norway (indeed owls of several species are not uncommon at sea). He then proceeded to recount the amazing birds that workers on oil platforms etc. have found over the years, and the difficulties these often inexperienced 'birders' have in identification, sometimes even unable to see a bird properly. The whole birding environment is different from onshore, where one can wear suitable clothing and even camouflage, rather than the bright work clothes of an oil man. Even the view of a bird is different, sometimes looking down on it, sometimes lit up by bright lights, or even just a glimpse as the bird flies past. All these awkward moments plus the inexperience of the observer makes identification difficult, so that descriptions sent ashore are often lacking in substance.

Once descriptions are received onshore, experts need to determine the species, but photographs help and what might seem a wildly erroneous identification can indeed be correct, as the 250 species recorded testifies (including budgies!). Examples are a Black-browed Albatross and Black Stork - nothing can be ruled out. The number of observers during the 40 years has been 787 and the number of records almost 150,000, of which 185 have had rings. With the decline in the oil industry and an accompanying increase in safety procedures, it is less easy now to record birds, with records averaging 4,000 per year in the

1990s now down to 2,500 this century. Most of the records are in the migration seasons, especially in autumn. Novel ways have been found to attract birds, such as old Christmas trees with seeds and fruits, and these can be successful. Other foodstuffs put out for birds are clearly mostly unsuitable, such as bread. Many workers engage with the birds, building cages and boxes, with some of the rarer species given a lift ashore by helicopter. These include rarities such as Gyr Falcon and Scops Owl, both of which were released in north-east Scotland. Many die, in which cases the corpses are often sent to the National Museums Scotland. Of ringed birds, travels are many and varied such as a Robin from Poland, a Little Bunting ringed on Fair Isle and a Great Black-backed Gull which spent several years to-ing and fro-ing from Norway to Peterhead via the rigs.

Plate 371. Andrew Thorpe. © *David Palmar*

Andrew finished off by mentioning other taxa recorded - bats, butterflies and moths, dragonflies, marine mammals, which included a very friendly Killer Whale, and sharks. Even a Rabbit and a Frog, thought to have been hiding in pipes lifted from shore to rig.

All in all, a fascinating talk on a novel aspect of birding.

Norman Elkins

Plate 372. Nigel Collar. © *David Palmar*

Birds and people - Nigel Collar

In this talk, Nigel provided us with a *tour de force* of how birds throughout human history have inspired ideas and great works of art. They have provided important resources and 'ecosystem services' and yet, sadly they have been subjects of over exploitation and 'intolerable abuse'.

Birds inhabit famous paintings dating back from 15th century religious art to those in the modern impressionist movement such as Van Gogh's 'Wheat Field with Crows' (1890). Birds have brought paintings to life, for example Bruegel's winter landscape (1565) would seem lifeless without the apparently insignificant birds. The great poets and playwrights have used birds as a source of inspiration, such as Robert Frost's 'Dust of Crow', and Shakespeare made frequent reference to birds. The great composers and musicians, such as Beethoven, Mahler and Berg have used bird songs to inspire their masterpieces. Birds have also been used as religious icons, the dove symbolising peace. They have been used as commercial icons, and no fewer than 353 beers have used bird names, or icons in their branding.

We were informed that almost half of the world's bird species (4,561, in fact) have been used by humans for food, feathers and other materials. Egyptian murals have recorded fowling in the Nile Delta (Nebamun's Tomb, 1400 BC) and many royal courts have developed the art of falconry. Pigeons were domesticated about 1,100 years ago, and their eggs formed an important source of protein. The

Plate 373. Three 'generations' of Young Birders' Training Course attendees (left to right: Ally Lemon, Ptolemy Mckinnon, Hannah Lemon, Hannah Coburn and Sam Hood) on one of the conference outings, Cairngorms, October 2018. © *Samuel Hood*

millinery trade, supplying feathers for ladies' hats and clothes was big business, with no fewer than 10,000 people in Paris working in this trade during 1900.

Birds entertain us in our gardens, with the bird food industry worth millions per annum. They have been used as so called 'biodiversity indicators', famously demonstrated in Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962), warning us of the damaging environmental consequences of pesticides. Birds also help to maintain healthy ecosystems, and we were informed that Red-winged Blackbirds feed their young on 4,260 tons of insect every year!

Despite all these values, we are increasingly abusing birds, over-exploiting populations and destroying their habitats. We have driven once superabundant species such as the Passenger Pigeon to extinction. We farm chickens in inhumane battery units to feed our insatiable appetite for chicken. We owe birds a great deal, as they have given so much.

Michael Thornton

It was now time for the annual raffle which was run in a more time-saving way, ably assisted by young A/V technician Michael Sinclair who had, with the assistance of his dad, Kevin, supervised all the lectures, smoothing out any audio difficulties. The raffle realised a total of £694 and Wendy thanked all the many prize contributors. The Branch Awards were next, this year going to David Clugston (Clyde), Bob McCurley (Tayside) and Brian Smith (Dumfries & Galloway). Many congratulations.

SOC President Ian Bainbridge then wound up proceedings by thanking all the people who had made the Conference such a success and wished all 190 delegates a safe journey home. The number of young ornithologists at this year's event (a total of 22) had been noticeable, with all of the young persons' places being subsidised thanks to the generous legacies that the Club receives.

As everyone left, sunshine was again lighting up a brilliant Cairngorms background and the Speyside forest colours were at their very best.

Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Ayrshire: Miss F. Thomson, Mr M. Zabransky, **Borders:** Ms L. Bickmore, Dr R. Catalano, Mrs J. Miller, Mr J. Weir, **Caithness:** Dr A. Adlard, **Clyde:** Mr S. Bowie, Dr R. Campbell, Ms K. Foster, Mr & Mrs R. Hamilton, Mr C. Jackson, Mr M. Lough, Mr H. Molloy, Mr P. Noyes, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr F. Hopkin, Mr S. Keightley, Mr J. Lennon, **Fife:** Mr E. Thirkell, **Highland:** Ms C. Hock, Mr S. Levene, Mrs H. Skuodas, **Lothian:** Mr A. Batty, Ms S. Borer, Mr C. Boyce, Mr B. Carson, Mr E. Dawson, Dr M. Fisken, Mr C. Herbert, Mrs J. Hobin, Mrs H. Kennedy, Mr D. Lindgren, Mr D.W. McManus, Mr & Mrs C. Milburn, Mr L. Mitchell, Ms J. Noble, Ms I. O'Neill, Prof & Mrs J.D. Pickard, Mr A. Pittendrigh, Mr & Mrs J. Richards, Sir J. Taylor, **Moray:** Mr & Mrs P. Hawe, Mrs H. Sim, **North-East Scotland:** Mr D. Adam, Mr M. Rust, **Orkney:** Mr R. Taylor, **Stewartry:** Mr R.A. Scott & Ms R.E. Skatvedt, **Tayside:** Mr & Mrs M. Conlon.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

16 March 2019, Corran Halls, Oban. See programme and booking information enclosed or visit www.bto.org/sbc2019

Waterston House

Christmas Opening hours

Waterston House will remain open during the festive season, closing only on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Art exhibitions

Lucy Newton until 16 January 2019: In this exhibition of new paintings, Lucy continues to draw inspiration from the variety of habitats and wildlife in Scotland. She aims to share her sense of wonder at the natural world around us, including in our backyard. From watching Grey Wagtails bobbing from rock to rock along peaty Pentland streams to Red Squirrels in lichen-laden forests of the Highlands, she tries to capture the essence of these encounters. Lucy works primarily in watercolour, often combined with other media such as charcoal, ink and acrylic. "I vary the medium and the marks to suit the subject, painting seabirds using large watery strokes, for example, while sketching Hedgehogs in my back garden using scratchy sticks found nearby." After completing a degree at Edinburgh College of Art, Lucy spent some time working as an illustrator, for the *Sunday Herald* in particular. She now works primarily as a freelance artist, happy to combine her love of wildlife with her love of art.

Botanical Art Exhibition, 19 January to 27 February 2019: The Scottish Society of Botanical Artists (SSBA) will exhibit at the Donald Watson Gallery, for the first exhibition of 2019. The SSBA provides a forum for botanical artists in Scotland to meet, exhibit work and share their knowledge and enthusiasm for an art form with a long history. Botanical painting was initially used to record the nature of plants, often for scientific purposes. Work by botanical artists today, while staying true to the representation of nature, focuses on the inspirational beauty of plants. This exhibition will present the work of members of the SSBA alongside ceramic sculptures by Ellen McCann. Based in Biggar, Ellen takes her inspiration from the growth patterns of plants, to produce a very personal interpretation.

Plate 374. Barn Owl. © *Lucy Newton*

Plate 375. *Briza maxima* © *Ellen McCann*

Advance notice of future exhibitions

2 March to 10 April: a mixed exhibition of wildlife printmaking by Carry Akroyd, Babs Pease, Kelly Stewart and Susie Wright.

13 April to 22 May: a joint exhibition by Kittie Jones and Jane Smith.

Lovebirds...

In August, SOC's Development Officer, Jane Cleaver, tied the knot with SOC member, James Allison. Although they both hail from the West (Lenzie), they choose Tyninghame village hall in East Lothian for their special day because of their regular visits to the area during their courtship. The pair first set eyes on each other at Musselburgh Lagoons in 2013 while Jane was out on a bird identification field trip with former colleague, Dave Allan (Dave has admitted to endeavouring to engineer the meeting!). However, it wasn't until the SOC Annual Conference in 2014 that they actually met properly and by the end of the event, James had Jane's telephone number. Council wishes Jane and James a very happy future together.

From January 2019, Jane's email address will be: jane.allison@the-soc.org.uk

Plate 376. Mr & Mrs Allison, Tyninghame, Lothian, 4 August 2018. © *Caro Weiss Photography*

John Davies retires from Library Committee

In September 2018, John Davies retired from the SOC Library Committee after 20 years of voluntary service, including a term of six years as the Club's Librarian from 1999. He was involved in the monumental task of relocating the library from Regent Terrace to Musselburgh and then moving it again into its present accommodation in Waterston House. John was largely responsible for the computerisation of the library catalogue, and for keeping the catalogue up to date with new acquisitions. He provided continuity to the expertise and management of the library over two eventful decades, contributing greatly to its successful development. Thank you, John!

Alan Knox, Chairman, Library Committee

Branch news

Orkney branch

At Orkney branch's recent AGM, outgoing Chair Peter Slater stood down after four years in the role. Peter was instrumental in bringing the branch back from the brink of folding at the start of his chairmanship, and it's with great thanks that we wish him well. Former, long-standing Secretary of the branch, Colin Corse, has taken up the reins of Chair.

Clyde branch

Branch Secretary, Ian Fulton's new email address is: clydesecretary@the-soc.org.uk

For a full list of up-to-date contact details for branch secretaries, please see the inside back cover of this issue or visit www.the-soc.org.uk/local-branches

Borders Bird Report for 2017

The *Borders Bird Report* for 2017 is now available. The 170-page report covers summaries of the 218 species recorded during the year, including the first Dark-eyed Junco for Borders and accounts of Western Bonelli's Warbler and Black-browed Albatross, both of which were only the second records for the region. An outline of bird watching at the increasingly watched Greenlaw Farm Pool in Foulden is also given, along with the annual ringing report. The report is illustrated with colour photographs taken by local birders and is generously supported by graphs depicting trends of records in recent years. Copies are available from Malcolm Ross, 24 Netherbank, Galashiels, TD1 3DH and are £8 plus £2 P&P. Alternatively, copies are available at Waterston House.

Request: *Borders Bird Reports*

If anyone has any back copies (pre-2009) of the *Borders Bird Report* and would like to sell them (or better still, give them away), please contact Tom Brewis on tbrewis@btinternet.com

Memorial poppies at Waterston House

The Aberlady Remembers project was launched in January 2018 by the Aberlady Craft Group whilst at their regular meeting venue, the Donald Watson Gallery here at Waterston House. The group was eager to in some way commemorate the end of WW1 and incorporate the 100th Anniversary of the RAF. Their Wednesday group meetings allowed the space to involve as many people who wished to take part in the project and many people who were visiting the gallery on a Wednesday morning when the group were working were very interested in their activities and ended up participating by donating their own handmade poppies for the community display.

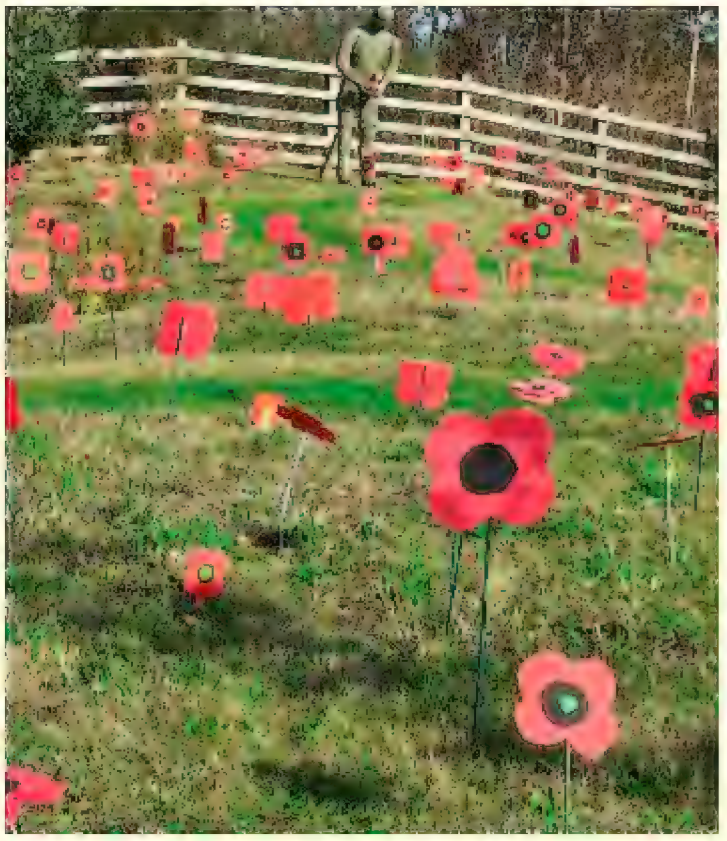

Plate 377. Memorial poppies at Waterston House, Aberlady, October 2018. © *Margaret Langan-Fortune*

This year, the display incorporates life-sized figures around the village, all relating to some aspect of the war years. The figure situated among the poppies at Waterston House gives a history of the importance of pigeons during the war. The WW1 connection is also continued inside the centre, with a small display in the library describing how a passion for birds helped founding member of the Club, George Waterston, endure life in a German prisoner of war camp.

Plate 378. Barry Thurston (left) and Tom Lawson (right) looking for bargains at the second-hand book sale, Waterston House, September 2018. © *Susan Horne*

SOC second-hand book sale

The SOC's unique library began with generous gifts of books from its own members. The collection has grown through further donations to the present day, resulting in a truly comprehensive library. At just over 5,000 items it is the largest ornithological collection in Scotland.

If any of the donated books are surplus to requirements they are sold in our own second-hand book shop to raise funds for the Club's activities. In September 2018, we held a special half-price book sale to help release storage space and expose more of our great stock for sale. With the help of HQ staff and volunteers, all our stock was displayed on extra shelving in the foyer of Waterston House and promoted in *Scottish Birds* and the Club's social media.

An impressive £3,077 was raised from the sale. The Library Committee would like to thank all those members who so generously donated their unwanted books, the individuals who helped to make this event such a success and, of course, to all of you who supported the sale by buying the books.

Susan Horne, SOC Librarian

Northern Flyway at the Beacon Arts Centre, in association with SOC

On 25 September 2018, we were treated to a fabulous live performance of 'Northern Flyway' at the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock. The project is the brainchild of Inge Thomson (a native of Fair Isle) and Jenny Sturgeon (a seabird scientist) and they were accompanied by the multi-talented Sarah Hayes (from the group Admiral Fallow) and Jason Singh (a 'beat boxer' with a passion for nature who produced an amazing mix of sounds). Other people who were also an integral part of the project were also present on the night. Peter Cairns, the award-winning photographer and co-author of the book *Scotland - A Rewilding Journey* gave us an inspirational talk about rewilding before the performance proper. Magnus Robb from the *Sound Approach to Birding* (with 65,000 bird calls in their archive, and who provided a lot of the material) was available to chat to afterwards - he hails from Edinburgh, but now lives in Portugal.

The whole event was a huge collaboration of creative individuals all deeply inspired by nature, especially birds and their migrations. The backdrop to the performance was a superb mix of still and moving images of wildlife from Scotland and often used very skillfully by being projected on the musicians themselves. The blend of music involving a variety of instruments, singers, bird song, field recordings, and short interviews was very skillfully done and seamless. Inge and Jenny's voices were beautiful. We were asked not to clap at the end of each item, so as not to interrupt the flow, and it worked to help one lose oneself in the extravaganza.

Plate 379. Jenny Sturgeon and Inge Thomson of Northern Flyway, Greenock, Clyde, September 2018. © *Zul Bhatia*

Plate 380. Northern Flyway performance (left to right: Jason Singh, Sarah Hayes, Jenny Sturgeon and Inge Thomson), Greenock, Clyde, September 2018. © *Zul Bhatia*

The event was being run in association with SOC, as the Club provided financial support through *The Birds of Scotland Fund*. We had a small stall manned by Clyde branch member Liz Parsons and myself. It gave us an opportunity to explain to those present more about what SOC did both nationally and locally.

It was a wild, stormy night which probably affected the attendance, but those of us who were there enjoyed a very special treat. If you get a chance, do go and see it.

Zul Bhatia, Clyde Branch Chair

SOC on social media

Remember, you don't need to be signed up to Facebook or Twitter to view the Club's social media profiles. These pages are visible to all and freely accessible.

To view our Facebook page, visit www.facebook.com/scotlandsbirdclub or click on the icon at the bottom of any page on the SOC website.

For Twitter, visit www.twitter.com/scottishbirding or click on the icon, similarly located at the bottom of every page on the Club's website.

Are you missing your reminder emails from SOC?

In line with the new Data Protection Regulations, in order for SOC to be able to send you email reminders about forthcoming talks, outings, details of events etc, you need to give us your consent (if you would like to receive these). To provide your consent visit www.the-soc.org.uk/members-area

You also have the option of subscribing to receive details of:
Arts-related events which you can sign up for here: eepurl.com/dtBM4b
Guided Walks which you can sign up for details of here: eepurl.com/dyqFHv

You can also provide your consent (or update your consents at any time) by contacting Headquarters on 01875 871 330 or in person at Waterston House. We'd be delighted to hear from you via any of these means!

Plate 381. Setting up the SOC stand at Eden Estuary Nature Reserve's 40th Anniversary Event (John Irwin behind the stand with Shirley Millar, left, and Les Hatton), Guardbridge, Fife, 30 September 2018. © *Elizabeth Irwin*

Eden Estuary Nature Reserve's 40th anniversary event, 30 September 2018

Volunteers from Fife branch recently joined in the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the Eden Estuary Nature Reserve in Guardbridge, Fife. Elizabeth and John Irwin and Alison and Rodger Neilson attended the Anniversary event, manning a small stand and promoting the branch and wider Club to attendees unfamiliar with the work of SOC, as well as having the opportunity to meet and thank many existing members. John even took on the role of 'guide in the hide' showing visitors what birds were about (including a very obliging Kingfisher and two Little Egrets)! Event goers were treated to a ringing demonstration by the Tay Ringing Group, with over 70 birds ringed that day. The event was also intended to thank people who had supported the original plans for the hide and to raise funds for an outdoor public telescope overlooking the estuary.

'Feathers and Flight' - the Lothian branch supports the installation of a bird-themed interpretation panel at Dunbar Harbour

Dunbar Harbour is an excellent place to view Kittiwakes in spring and summer when nesting Fulmars can also be seen west of the Harbour, and it's also a hot spot for Purple Sandpipers during the winter.

Earlier this year, Lothian-branch donated the printing and installation costs of an Interpretation Panel at the harbour so that visitors and locals could better appreciate the harbour's birdlife and find out more about some of its feathered residents with children and adults similarly engaged. Browsers also have the option of learning the traditional Scots bird names and related-legends for a number of species.

Many thanks to the Lothian branch for their support!

Kenny Maule, Dunbar Harbour Trust

Plate 382. SOC Lothian branch-funded interpretation board in situ on the upper north wall/pier of Victoria Harbour, Dunbar, Lothian. © *Kenny Maule*

Plate 383. Guided walks leader, Scott Paterson (second from left), briefing the group before heading off down to Aberlady Bay, Lothian, August 2018. © *Wendy Hicks*

Guided walks: Woodpigeons, waders and wonky bins!

Headquarters have been organising regular Birdwatching for Beginners walks around the Lothians with Dave Allan at the helm for over a decade. Since Dave retired in April earlier this year, I have taken on the role of leading the regular programme of walks, as the Club's Birding Skills Trainer.

The walks are aimed primarily at beginners or improvers and provide an enjoyable introduction to bird identification. Participants are keen to learn or improve bird identification skills for a variety of reasons, from the simple satisfaction of being able to recognise and put a name to a bird when out and about to naming a species seen from the kitchen window. Being able to identify a bird either through seeing or hearing connects people with their environment and perhaps brings a more meaningful understanding to their relationship with the outdoors. But, where do you start if starting at the very beginning?

"This has been a wonderful course. Scott is incredibly knowledgeable and an excellent guide. Lots of practical tips!" - Alan

The walks initially focus on common bird species familiar to most such as Woodpigeon and Carrion Crow, looking not just at plumage features, but for structural and behavioural clues as well, with the aim being to get participants looking at familiar birds in perhaps a new way. Even the very beginner will have some bird knowledge gained through familiarity with common species seen regularly so the rationale behind the walks is to develop this knowledge and give walk-goers a set of tools which can be used to identify birds. By looking at common species, we hope that the confidence of participants will grow and their ability to identify species will develop from a diagnostic approach to a more intuitive approach. Of course, to do this we need a half-decent pair of binoculars and before we go anywhere optics are discussed and any wonky bins are, well, binned! The SOC has a supply of good reliable binoculars available for loan to walk attendees.

Each walk programme consists of four sessions which take place in East Lothian where a variety of habitats are available from the lagoons at Musselburgh to the farmland surrounding the Pencaitland Railway Walk. Each of the four walks lasts two to three hours and takes place either mid-week or at weekends with no more than ten participants. There is no indoor component although this may be an option on bad weather days. These days bird identification books and resources are of exceptional quality and are an invaluable tool but there is no substitute for experiencing birds in the field where, as we all know, a variety of factors can cause things to

appear very differently from illustrations or photos and therefore we aim to develop bird identification skills out in the field where light conditions and weather vary.

"Scott's excellent knowledge and the friendly, relaxed atmosphere made it very enjoyable" - Olwen

The pace of the walks, as our previous participants would be able to tell you, is leisurely and informal with the emphasis on tackling the identification of whatever comes our way, be it an unseen Robin singing or learning how to identify a distant flying Woodpigeon. Bird identification can be frustrating and sometimes bewildering and it is the aim of the walks to remove some of the mystery and create an atmosphere where everyone will feel comfortable asking questions.

The identification of bird calls and song is a challenge that walk participants are particularly keen to take up and develop. Again, we focus on the calls and songs of common species that we come across on the day and this is an area I am keen to develop too as what sounds like a raucous honk to one person may be a rasping squawk to another!

"I do not think that you are ever too experienced that you cannot benefit from a walk with Scott" - David

Obviously over a four-week course we can't cover every aspect of bird identification but hopefully we can improve confidence, and develop skills whether for the casual kitchen-window birder or a potential Breeding Bird Survey participant.

Plate 384. A guided walk at Musselburgh Lagoons, Lothian, October 2018. © *Scott Paterson*

Plate 385. A guided walk at Pencaitland Railway Walk, Lothian, October 2018. © *Scott Paterson*

Plans for the future include an expansion into the Upper Forth, Fife and Perth & Kinross areas with regular sessions at one or two other locations throughout the year plus occasional workshops on a particular theme such as bird sounds identification.

"Scott is an excellent tutor, gives lots of background as well as ID tips. I especially appreciate his objective and scientific approach" - Maggie

If you are interested in receiving details of future walk programmes and any potential workshops related to this, sign up to the guided walks mailing list here: eepurl.com/dyqFHv. You will be very welcome!

Scott Paterson, SOC Birding Skills Officer

Corrections to the last issue

The caption to Plate 236, page 279 should read Dawlish town, rather than Dawlish Warren.

In the obituary for Cliff Henty on page 244, the photograph should be credited to Roy Sexton.

Plate 386. Juvenile Green Woodpecker, near Straiton, Ayrshire, 3 August 2017. © *A. Hogg*

The Green Woodpecker in Ayrshire

A. HOGG

The Green Woodpecker was first recorded in Ayrshire in 1925 when one was heard calling from the Blairquhan estate woodlands (Richards 1966). Unfortunately, the bird was not seen, but the person who heard it was, apparently, well aware of the species' rarity in Scotland at the time. Indeed, the bird scarcely gets a mention in south-west Scotland before this, and national records remained at a low level until the end of the 1940s.

The second Ayrshire record came in 1961 when a pair took up residence in 'Central Ayrshire' and remained in the area for a few years (Richards 1966). In 1962, another bird was seen at Alton Albany, Barr (Hughes-Onslow undated), where breeding was not proved, although several nest-holes were found. For a bird which can be fairly vocal in the early part of the spring when it is setting up its breeding territory, it can also prove quite tricky to obtain clear proof of breeding since it often becomes very elusive during the nesting period.

1974 saw the next Ayrshire record when one was present in the Portencross-Hunterston area between March and August (Forrester & Gibson 1975). Three more records followed in 1977, when an adult was watched carrying food in Knockdolian Wood, this representing the first 'probable' breeding record. A pair was present throughout the year 'near Kilwinning' (possibly Montgreenan), and a single was observed at Sundrum in late May (Hogg 1978).

From here on, for a few years, the pace of colonisation picked up. It seems likely that a pair bred at Portencross during 1978, where a juvenile was seen on 20 August. A pair remained at Knockdolian, and other pairs were noted at Kilkerran, Kelburn and Blair, all locations with large stands of suitable, mature woodland. Two spring records of single birds were also recorded from the lower Girvan valley (Hogg 1979). An even bigger number of records came in during 1979, with the bird stated to have bred

at three or four locations (Portencross-Hunterston, Fairlie and Knockdolian) (Hogg 1980). It was also seen on single dates at four other locations - during this period the species was steadily expanding its range northwards in Scotland (Forrester *et al*. 2007).

In 1980, a pair reared three young at Hunterston, with other pairs noted at Portencross, Auchinleck estate and Knockdolian, and single records at four other sites (Hogg 1981). At this point, it looked like the species might expand its range, and perhaps breed in more Ayrshire woodlands. However, as can be seen from Figure 1, the number of locations from which the bird was subsequently recorded fluctuated greatly, and proven breeding was only recorded during a handful of years.

Absolute proof of breeding for Green Woodpecker in Ayrshire has remained difficult to obtain, largely due to observer effort and coverage within the county, along with the bird's secretive nature during incubation and feeding stages. However, despite the low number of such records, it has shown a faithfulness to certain sites, most of them in sub-optimal habitat for the species. Territorial pairs persisted in many northern areas such as the Largs to Portencross stretch but, although the bird continues to show up at some central and southern sites, many such records refer to migrant birds, March and April being months when birds arrive in Ayrshire by following the main watercourses northwards from Dumfries & Galloway (Forrester *et al*. 2007).

A marked reduction in records came in 1982, following a harsh winter; something which Green Woodpeckers don't appear to handle too well. This decline was noted elsewhere in Scotland, with many northern areas being forsaken, with notable decreases witnessed in southern regions such as Dumfries & Galloway.

Breeding continued, with a pair reported as probably breeding in North Ayrshire during 1985 (Hogg 1986), and also in the centre of the county in 1988 (Hogg 1989). This was followed by another breeding report from North Ayrshire in 1992, but the same year provided an intriguing record, when a sickly juvenile was collected during August by a golfer at Troon and taken to Hessilhead Wildlife Centre (Hogg 1993). Had it been reared locally? The woodland nearby at South Wood is certainly suitable, and Green Woodpecker has a surprising ability to avoid detection, even in well-populated areas. Two pairs reportedly bred in 1993 (Hogg 1994), but there was a marked decline in records thereafter. At least one territorial pair clung on at the Portencross site in 1996 and 1997 (Hogg 1997–98), but a collapse in reports followed, with no records at all during 2004, 2013 and 2015 (Figure 1) (Hogg *et al*. 2005–16).

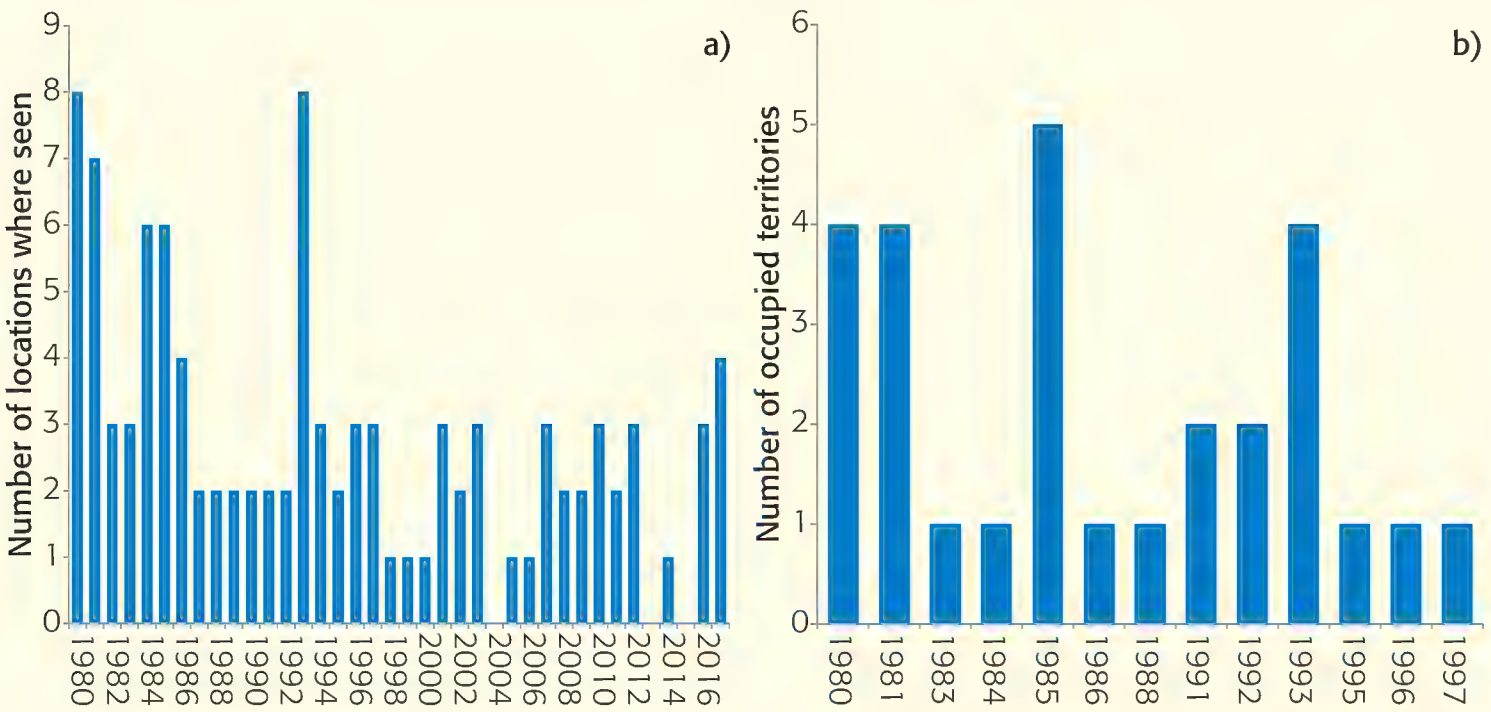

Figure 1a. Number of locations where Green Woodpecker were recorded in Ayrshire, 1980–2017. **1b.** Number of locations with maintained territories of Green Woodpecker in Ayrshire, 1980–1997.

On 15 April 2016, a single bird was heard calling from the oak woodland at Craigencallie, Straiton, but no sooner had it flown across the river and landed on a tree when it was chased off and caught by a female Sparrowhawk - a somewhat unfortunate re-emergence of the species within the county. However, a check of the same woodland in early spring 2017 revealed the presence of a pair. Repeated visits to the site revealed their continued presence there through May, June and July, by which time they had become considerably less vocal and often difficult to see. A likely nest hole was discovered in mid-June, and a visit on 31 July produced clear evidence that they had been successful, with three fledged juveniles noisily flying around (Plates 386 & 387). This is the first proven breeding record for 24 years, although it's quite possible that breeding has gone undetected elsewhere in Ayrshire during this time.

Clearly, the recent fluctuations in Ayrshire's Green Woodpecker population will remain partly shrouded in mystery, for reasons stated above, but it would appear that the current low density of the breeding population has been affected by habitat restriction and climatic problems. This can be a flamboyant and a frustrating species to watch, depending on the time of year but, for anyone visiting an area of suitable woodland in Ayrshire in the spring, it would still be worth listening for that 'yaffle' call.

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Plate 387. Juvenile Green Woodpecker, near Straiton, Ayrshire, 3 August 2017. © *A. Hogg*

Plate 388. Moray Bird Club outing to Findhorn Bay, Moray & Nairn, November 2015. © *Jack Wood*

Moray Bird Club – the youngest branch of the SOC

M. COOK

Back in 2013, it was becoming evident that the number of birders in Moray was steadily increasing but we lacked any form of cohesion. Occasionally, you might bump into somebody while out birding, but otherwise the only assembly of local birders took place when a rarity was discovered. But this is Moray, a small region without an east-facing coast - so we didn't meet very often!

If we wanted to join a bird club then it was the SOC branches in Inverness or Aberdeen. This entailed a return trip of 76 or 132 miles - not an inviting prospect on a winter's evening. We did some local canvassing and found that there was enthusiasm to start our own branch of the SOC, and so 'Moray Bird Club - the Moray branch of the SOC' was born.

From the outset, we wanted the emphasis to be on the social aspects of the Club. It should provide plenty of opportunity to meet with like-minded folk, and share our experiences of local birds and birding in a convivial atmosphere.

Our programme of indoor meetings runs from October to March, with the March meeting being a Members' Evening when many different people have given short presentations or showed their local photographs. Some initial 'market research' among our members indicated a wish for the emphasis of our talks to be on topics of local relevance and interest, and we have tried to cater for this in the great majority of our meetings.

The people who attend, often 40–50, have a wide range of birding experience from beginners to those who have watched birds for more years than they would care to admit. As a consequence, we include in most of our meetings a 5–10-minute slot featuring the identification of a species or group of birds. After the main talk, we provide refreshments and most people stay to enjoy a good chat.

Throughout the winter and early spring, we run a series of weekend half-day outings to local sites and for the last two years we have included a joint outing with Highland branch, to sites close to the border of our respective regions. We also have a dawn chorus outing in late April or early May which has been remarkably well supported in view of the unsociable hour at which we have to meet!

On several occasions in recent years, we have chartered a boat from Buckie Harbour to take us east to the White-billed Diver hot spot between Cullen and Portsoy. Poor weather has sometimes thwarted our plans but on the best day we saw at least ten of the divers. Being somewhat parochial, some of us strain to find birds on 'our' side of the Moray/Aberdeenshire boundary - and we usually manage 1–2!

Another popular feature of our birding year is the annual Bird Race which takes place in May. In car loads of 3–4 people, we spend 12 hours from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. touring as many habitats as possible within Moray, scouring the area to build a day list. It is great fun on two levels, competing with others on the day, and trying to beat your own team's previous best. The best tally yet achieved is 110 species - a target waiting to be bettered next year! At the end of the day, we meet up for a meal and to exchange tales of the day's endeavour - another highly enjoyable social occasion. Such was the enthusiasm that last winter we ran the first New Year Bird Race.

On two occasions we have involved the club membership in a summer survey. In 2014, we surveyed all current and former Black-headed Gull colonies - and confirmed what we feared, that Black-headed Gull is now an uncommon breeder in Moray. Another year, we surveyed the bird life of the entire length of the River Spey that falls within Moray, allocating sections of river to different club members. The results of these surveys are written up in the relevant Moray & Nairn bird reports. Future local surveys will be advertised at indoor meetings, on the club website and by e-mail to our membership.

Plate 389. Moray Bird Club trip leaving Buckie Harbour for White-billed Divers, May 2016. © *Laura Main*

Plate 390. White-billed Diver, Buckie-Portsoy, Moray & Nairn/North-east Scotland, 1 May 2016. © *David Devonport*

An important aim of our Club is to share opportunities for those who are just embarking on their interest in birding, or keen to take it a stage further. In two recent years, including 2018, we have run a short series of 'beginners' outings', free of charge, with this aim in mind. These have comprised five full-day outings, spread between April and July, visiting a small number of different sites during the day to concentrate on birding skills, including recognition of calls and songs. Our hope is that greater knowledge of birds and enthusiasm for birding may result, and new friendships may be forged. Perhaps more confidence to take on work such as BTO surveys will also follow. To the leader at least these outings have proved hugely enjoyable!

Another feature which sets out to provide a cohesive force for local birding is our club website *Birds in Moray and Nairn* which is found at www.birdsinmorayandnairn.org Among many other things, this contains a regularly updated Recent Records page, news of club activities, interesting ringing recoveries and a gallery of locally taken pictures. The annual bird report, entitled *Birds in Moray & Nairn*, is now produced in digital form on the website only - but those wishing a hard copy can print it from here. In a small area such as Moray and Nairn, the cost of producing a relatively small print run of a glossy annual report became prohibitive, but the benefits of the digital report are clear. We are not restricted as to length and can include as many pictures as we wish. We can make any additions and corrections, and the whole thing is constantly available, free of charge on phones and other portable electronic devices.

As to the future, our upcoming programme of winter talks will feature species as diverse as Shags, Cuckoos, Ospreys and Short-eared Owls; and to show that we are not entirely blinkered to other aspects of Moray's rich wildlife, we have a meeting devoted to moths. In the summer of 2019, we plan to survey all inland gull colonies in the final year of fieldwork for the national Seabirds Count - and there are also early thoughts of a Swift survey. And, importantly, our attempts to spread knowledge and enthusiasm for birds in our local community will continue.

Martin Cook, Clochan, Buckie.
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Long-lived Bar-tailed Godwit

N. WILKINSON, J.D. WILSON & T. SMITH

A chance encounter with a colour-ringed Bar-tailed Godwit whilst out for a day's birding in East Lothian during the 2017 Christmas break uncovered a remarkable individual story. Meeting up at Musselburgh nature reserve on the morning of 28 December 2017, and scanning through the waders gathered on the ice-covered lagoons, JDW noticed a darvic-ringed Bar-tailed Godwit. In bright winter sunshine and with the bird relatively close to the hide, we were quickly able to read the black-coded white ring as 'JJL2'. Unaware of any colour-ringing projects on the species, this was a bit of a mystery.

A search online that evening, followed by an exchange of e-mails several weeks later, and the bird's identity was confirmed and a little of its history uncovered. This female Bar-tailed Godwit is at least 31 years old, having been ringed a little further up the Forth at Dalmeny (Lothian) on 21 March 1987 before next being caught and colour ringed in the far north-east of Norway (Porsanger, Finnmark) 30 years later in May 2017. Up until this point, its history during the past 30 years was a mystery. Remarkably, this is the third bird that the Norwegian team have caught or resighted which is around 30 years of age. They suspect that of the wader species breeding in the far north, Bar-tailed Godwits abandon their breeding attempt most easily, with success every fourth year when either lemmings or voles are super abundant.

The oldest recorded Bar-tailed Godwit in Britain and Ireland is 33 years, 11 months and 13 days (in 2008; BTO online ringing report).

'JJL2', which had been recorded at Musselburgh since September 2017, was one of five ringed in Finnmark in spring 2017, of which two were fitted with satellite transmitters. In early January 2018, one was in the Dornoch Firth and the other in Spain.

And one last twist in the tale is that the sighting of 'JJL2' was something of a reunion for one of its observers. 21 March 1987 at Dalmeny was JDW's first day of cannon-netting as a trainee ringer in the Lothian Ringing Group. Meeting once again, the bird that became 'JJL2', almost 32 years later, it was all too clear who had aged better.

Nick Wilkinson, Jeremy D. Wilson & Trevor Smith, RSPB Scotland, 2 Lochside View, Edinburgh EH12 9DH.
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Plate 391. Bar-tailed Godwit 'JJL2' (with Oystercatchers), Musselburgh, Lothian, 16 December 2017. © *Ian Andrews*

Plate 392. Young Birders' Training Course participants (left to right: Dylan, Mark, Hannah, Bethia, Sean & Alice), Isle of May, 25 July 2018. © *Stuart Rivers*

SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory's 'Young Birders' Training Course' shortlisted for national award

J. ALLISON

Six years ago, the SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory (IoMBO), joined forces to pioneer the Young Birders' Training Course (YBTC): the first and only course of its kind. The pioneering course which funds naturalists aged 16–25 years to spend a week learning essential bird survey skills and techniques, has been shortlisted for a prestigious Nature of Scotland Award.

The project was shortlisted in the *SNH Youth and Education* category of the Awards which celebrate the businesses, charities, public sector and individuals working towards preserving Scotland's unique wildlife and natural environment.

This year, the Awards, which are run by RSPB Scotland and co-sponsored by Scottish Natural Heritage, attracted a record-breaking number of applications with the shortlist of entries revealed at a reception in the Scottish Parliament, hosted by Claudia Beamish MSP, on 12 September 2018.

The Club and Observatory's entry, the YBTC, provides a unique opportunity annually for three females and three males to spend a week at the observatory learning first-hand, a wide range of skills and techniques. Outwith the scope of most university/college curricula, these skills are essential attributes for those embarking on a career or role in wildlife recording/conservation.

"Opportunities for young people to connect with, understand and immerse themselves in the natural world have diminished over the past century, however the SOC and IoMBO have bucked the trend and is offering a high-quality, fun and popular opportunity for young people to learn new skills, make new friends and make the most of inter-generational mentoring relationships. These are the scientists, nature-lovers, conservationists and birders of the future, and the SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory are setting a high bar for other organisations around the country to now replicate what they've achieved - and in just a few short years."

Lucy McRobert, Communications Manager, The Wildlife Trusts and ex Creative Director, A Focus On Nature

Working in partnership, SOC and IoMBO draw upon the talents of highly experienced bird ringers, researchers and surveyors and ensure that participants receive first-class, expert tuition in an unrivalled and unique setting. With additional teaching and support provided by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) staff, YBTC also provides a network of contacts to assist participants on their journey.

So far, 30 young birdwatchers have taken part in the course which is funded by the SOC thanks to generous past members and supporters who have left legacies to the Club.

Investing in a future generation of conservationists, bird recorders and surveyors is, in the eyes of the Club, an excellent use of SOC's funds. Not only are we helping equip these young people with the skills which will help stand them apart in an employment setting, we're working to address the seemingly widening gap between today's young people and nature. One of the greatest legacies of the course has been the stimulation of related organisations to introduce and establish similar initiatives.

The winners in each award category will be announced at a black-tie presentation dinner taking place at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in Edinburgh on 22 November 2018. So, find out in the March 2019 issue how our entry fared! The awards will be hosted by TV presenter, writer and naturalist, Kate Humble, and BBC TV and radio presenter, Euan McIlwraith.

Plate 393. Young Birders' Training Course participants (left to right Alison Creamer, Hannah, Mark, Bethia, Sean, Alice, Mark Oksien & skipper Roy Giles, Isle of May, 25 July 2018. © *Stuart Rivers*

Young Birders' Training Course: a review

In preparing the Club and Observatory's application to the 2018 Nature of Scotland Awards, previous course participants were surveyed to try and determine the impact of the course on them as individuals, personally, professionally and developmentally, in their ornithological-related interests/career path.

The objectives

The objectives of YBTC are:

- to allow participants to gain invaluable first-hand practical experience of a wide range of bird survey skills and techniques including:
  - an introduction to the recording of birds (and other taxa),
  - species monitoring (including helping with ongoing seabird studies),
  - hands-on experience of bird ringing and trapping,
  - activities such as visible migration watches and co-ordinated seawatching counts,
  - practice in learning how to age, sex and identify birds.
- to provide a wildlife-rich backdrop to test their newly learnt skills.
- to work in partnership with related-organisations to allow participants exposure to some of Scotland's leading ornithologists including experienced bird ringers, researchers and surveyors.
- to ensure applicants are not prohibited from taking part due to personal financial limitations.
- to offer an exciting learning environment with broad appeal.
- to offer an insight into the work and purpose of a bird observatory and that of a National Nature Reserve.
- to provide a network of support for these individuals embarking on and pursuing their professional careers.
- to engage and encourage young naturalists to develop themselves and seek out future training and skills development opportunities, to ensure that in the years to come, there will be another generation of birdwatchers recording, conserving and speaking up for Scotland's birds.

The results

What, if any, impact did YBTC have on the participants who responded?

- 89% said taking part in YBTC had stimulated an increase in their time spent recording and reporting bird sightings.
- 88% have found themselves more engaged with nature and Scotland's wildlife since taking part in YBTC.
- 89% stated they were now more committed to conserving Scotland's natural heritage having taken part in the course.
- 89% believed their employability had improved as a consequence of YBTC.
- 75% said taking part in YBTC had motivated them to seek to become a bird ringer.
- 100% felt more confident, personally, as a consequence of YBTC.
- 89% felt their bird survey skills and techniques had improved as a consequence of YBTC.
- 78% stated YBTC had given them increased confidence and experience in applying for future jobs/placements.
- 57% said taking part in YBTC had encouraged them to use BirdTrack to a greater degree than they did before taking part in the course.
- Since taking part in YBTC, 89% have participated in further training courses/placements/internships (in related subjects). Further to this, all (100%) of these respondents believe taking part in YBTC has helped them to secure this position from a skills/knowledge perspective.
- 89% were now more actively engaged with (one/more of) the four partner organisations (SOC, IoMBO, CEH & SNH) involved in running the course.
- 100% of the respondents would recommend the course to others.

Find out more about what SOC is doing to help support and develop young birders on the Club's website www.the-soc.org.uk/get-involved/ young-birders and watch this space for news of more exciting developments in this area.

Jane Allison, SOC Development Officer

YOUNG BIRDERS' TRAINING COURSE

Applications are invited from individuals (aged 16-25) to participate in a week-long course run by SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory on the Isle of May.

- Course content will include species recording and data handling, seabird research, bird ringing, Isle of May NNR & aspects of bird observatory life
- Deadline for applications - 1st May 2019 at 5pm
- Course will be held on 6-13th July 2019
- Limited to six participants
- Basic, hostel-style accommodation
- Course substantially sponsored by SOC

Plate 394. Goldcrest nest, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2017. © *Ashley Jackson*

An unusual Goldcrest nest on North Uist, Outer Hebrides

A. JACKSON

The Goldcrest is a reasonably common bird in the Outer Hebrides, typically to be found in its favoured conifer plantations but it will also frequent any wooded or scrubland areas. The nest is usually to be found suspended underneath the branch of a conifer at varying height from 1 m upwards. It is not unheard of on the Scottish mainland for nests to be found in gorse bushes or in ivy against the trunk of a tree.

During the second week of May in 2017, I visited a conifer plantation on North Uist. It was divided into several distinctly isolated compartments that covered an area of c. 2 km^2, the height of the trees was *c.* 6 m, with some compartments densely planted (impossible to walk through) and at least one compartment thinned out and quite easily explored on foot.

Upon accessing the site, I stowed my rucksack in a slight ditch on the edge of one of the conifer blocks so that I could explore the site more comfortably. The ditch was about 0.6 m deep and 1.2 m wide and scantily lined with heather about 0.3 m in height. When returning to retrieve my rucksack a short while later, I jumped into the ditch and immediately became aware of a small bird flushing at my side from within the heather, not far from my foot. Having not got a proper look at the bird, not even to properly determine its size, I assumed I had flushed a Robin or Meadow Pipit from a nest and got onto my hands and knees to search. A few moments later a bird landed on a low conifer branch above me and started alarm calling persistently - this bird was a Goldcrest, not the Robin or Meadow Pipit

that I was expecting. Slightly bewildered, I continued in my search, assuming that the Goldcrest had a nest somewhere nearby, very nearby, but not the nest I was searching for.

After some further moments, I parted a clump of heather and saw the profile of a familiar looking moss nest, the nest of a Goldcrest (Plate 394). It was extremely well concealed and situated on the edge of the heather around 0.3 m off the ground, with the heather totally concealing the nest from above. The bird presumably accessed the nest via a small gap from underneath. This nest, containing four eggs, was located on the perimeter of an extensive area of conifer plantation (Plate 395) where there must have been tens of thousands of suitable trees in which to build a more typical and less vulnerable nest.

After retreating some distance away, I observed the bird returning to the nest after a couple of minutes. I've never known a Goldcrest to nest in a situation like this before and am unable to find anyone that has, or any literature that mentions this.

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Plate 395. Site of the Goldcrest nest at the forest edge, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2017. © *Ashley Jackson*

Plate 396. Sand Martin nest hole (note 50p piece for scale), Ley Farm, Innerleithen, Borders, 31 May 2017. © *Tom Dougall*

Wall-nesting Sand Martins – continued

T. DOUGALL

Jimmy Maxwell's note (*Scottish Birds* 38: 256–258) has prompted me to report an occurrence of wall-nesting Sand Martins in Borders in 2017.

While visiting Ley Farm, north of Innerleithen, on 31 May 2017, John Grieve the farmer drew my attention to a pair of Sand Martins entering and leaving a horizontal crevice in the stone wall of one of his outbuildings in an active courtyard. A pair had also been present in 2016.

The crevice entrance was 1.9 m above ground level and the wall thickness is 50 cm (Plate 396). John has resided at the farm for about 70 years, and 2016 was the first instance he can recall of Sand Martins nesting at his steading, which sits 50 m above the Leithen Water. I have estimated the straight-line distance from the nest crevice to the nearest stretch of the river as about 380 m.

The outcome of the nests is not known and Sand Martins did not nest there in 2018.

In addition, since I was surprised by Jimmy's comment that in *BWP* there are no reported instances of wall-nesting Sand Martins, then for the record, I can report two small colonies in Hawick, Borders, in at least the early 1970s - one in drainage holes in a stone retaining wall above the River Teviot at the east end of Commercial Street; and the other in a brick retaining wall at railway sidings at the north end of Eastfield Road about 190 m from the River Teviot.

Tom Dougall, Edinburgh.
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Plate 397. Sparrowhawk with Magpie, near Lamington, Clyde, February 2018. © *Andy Gunderson*

FIELD NOTES: Sparrowhawk drowning Magpie

A. GUNDERSON

On 21 February 2018, I had been sitting by my local river, the upper Clyde, where I was hoping to get some shots of the local Otters that fish the area. Having looked upstream, I saw a female Sparrowhawk sitting on the edge of a bush, so decided to try and approach it to get a photo. As I got level, the bird flew across the river and into the bushes on the opposite side. Suddenly, there was a loud screaming, and the Sparrowhawk flew out with a Magpie and went straight into the water. There it remained, holding it under the water. It drifted downstream with the Magpie until it stopped struggling before getting out and taking it up the banking, presumably to consume it.

Andy Gunderson, Uphall, West Lothian.
Email: andy.gunderson@yahoo.com

Mick Marquiss has commented: "this photo shows a Sparrowhawk holding a Magpie underwater, alongside an intriguing narrative that makes me wonder - do Sparrowhawks *intentionally* drown their prey? Such waterlogged events are only documented occasionally. 'Google' for example shows three images of Sparrowhawk holding prey underwater; a male with a Starling, a female gripping a half-submerged Green Woodpecker and another on a Magpie. Elsewhere, a 'YouTube' video clip portrays a protracted struggle as a Sparrowhawk attempts to subdue a Magpie on land, ending as the victim is dragged into a nearby puddle and held underwater. As with the incident described above, it is the sequence that provides compelling evidence for the purposeful drowning of large prey."

Plate 398. Sparrowhawk with Magpie, near Lamington, Clyde, February 2018. © *Andy Gunderson*

BOOK REVIEWS

Abernethy Forest - the history and ecology of an old Scottish pinewood. Ron W. Summers, 2018. RSPB, ISBN 978-1-9999882-0-3, hardback, 360 pages, £30.00.

There can be few, if any, SOC members who have not visited Abernethy Forest and this book explores the lower part of RSPB's second-largest land holding, plus a small area under different ownerships. Since 1990, the author, an RSPB scientist, has investigated the rich wildlife and processes which shape our largest Caledonian Pinewood. He is uniquely placed to describe the site's wildlife and explain what makes it so special.

An introductory chapter briefly describes Abernethy's geography, formation, soils and climate in its context as part of the world's 1.1 billion hectares of boreal forest. Although Abernethy Forest is the largest remnant of what was once a much larger native pinewood in Scotland it currently extends to only 3,800 ha, though a long-term aim is to double this. Definitions are given of what is meant by native pinewood, ancient native pinewood, semi-natural pinewood, Caledonian pinewood, old Caledonian pinewood and Caledonian forest. This may seem pedantic but is necessary to indicate the continued importance of this woodland despite Man's influence on its naturalness. The history of the Forest is treated in depth and I found this one of the most interesting chapters. Tree colonization following glaciation and the subsequent waxing and waning of forest cover resulting from climate change and human activity are examined through pollen analysis, dendrochronology (study of tree rings), old maps, photographs and other documentation as well as artefacts such as wooden water-pipes and fir-candles (which are unrelated to any "Two Ronnies" sketch!) The ensuing chapters on Plants, Fungi and Lichens, Invertebrates and Vertebrates describe the Forest's biodiversity and explain the inter-relationships of the 3,800 species recorded there so far. An endearing facet is the regular acknowledgement - and photographs - of co-workers in the many research projects in which Ron has been involved as well as the volunteer specialists who have done so much to enhance our knowledge of the site. Although no comprehensive species lists are provided, I consider that an appropriate balance has been struck between longer studies such as on Red Deer, Scots Pine and crossbills and briefer accounts of selected rarities e.g. Green Shield Moss, Pine Hoverfly and tree-nesting Swifts. The role of fire in shaping the Forest and its implications for appropriate management when the site is so small are examined in a thought-provoking section. Bring climate change into the equation and the quandaries become even more complex. A chapter comparing Abernethy Forest with other Scottish woodlands and boreal forests worldwide leads naturally to the final section on conservation management. There are many aspects to be considered here but the arguments are made clearly and succinctly e.g. on path closures to lessen disturbance to Capercaillie or re-introducing European Lynx to control deer. Throughout, the book is well illustrated with photographs, maps and understandable graphs and the Reference List of 862 citations indicates a thoroughness of approach.

I have waited a long time since I heard this book was in preparation, but it has truly surpassed expectations and my eyes have been opened to unseen delights of the forest on my doorstep! Did I mention the site has breeding Ospreys too?

Peter Gordon

Killing by Proxy. Alan Stewart, 2017. Thirsty Books, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-0-9932828-4-3, paperback, 256 pages, £9.99.

Alan Stewart is perhaps uniquely positioned to make informed comments about wildlife crime, and raptor persecution in particular. A retired police inspector, game shooter, National Wildlife Crime Unit intelligence officer, wildlife enthusiast and author of several previous books about his experiences in wildlife crime investigations, this, his latest book, is not just a fascinating dissection of the challenges facing investigators, but also a robust analysis of some of the recent politics surrounding wildlife crime.

The first part of the book looks at some of the appalling crimes and cruelty associated with Hare coursing, Badger baiting and illegal Fox hunting as well as taking the reader through some of the complexities in understanding bits of legislation where the wording of the law is far from clear.

The second, much larger, part of the book focuses on raptor persecution, and its particularly close association with the gamebird shooting industry. Alan provides an excellent summary, not just of investigations into some of the most notorious cases from the last few years, but he also analyses the

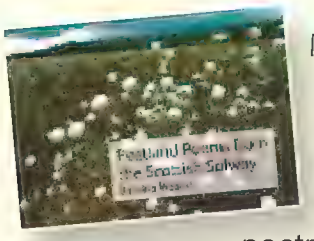
reactions that arose when these cases were publicised - a true commentary on the commentary!

As someone involved in assisting some of the investigations so eloquently detailed in this book, I recognise and share the author's frustration when the culprits in such cases do not face justice. Perhaps more important, however, and something that comes across very clearly in this book, is a clear desire on the part of the author that our fantastic natural heritage is properly protected by our laws, and that those who seek to illegally kill our wildlife should face every available sanction.

I heartily recommend this excellent book.

Ian Thomson

Peatland Poems from the Scottish Solway. Barbara Mearns, 2018. Barbara & Richard Mearns, Connansknowe, Kirkton, Dumfries, DG1 1SX (www.mearnsbooks.com), no ISBN , paperback, 63 pages, £6.50 + p&p.



Many poets praise birds yet few birders praise poetry. "What is poetry?" Boswell speired Johnson - "Why Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not". Much of what passes nowadays is impenetrable pretentious prose. Peatland? - wilderness, widespread in Scotland but scarce worldwide. Our Lowland bogs have been "improved". This slim volume praises bogs. Planted in her local Lochar Moss, bedded between evocative images, our passionate pilgrim laments loss but sings of restoration. A chosen sample, "Willow warblers: | I'm drinking from a waterfall of song | cascades of liquid descants | tumbling down pure and clear | through leafless birches | drowning a robin's whisper | and the hum of bees, | spilling out onto the sunny heath | quenching my thirst after winter drought." Her drouthy neebor Robert Burns, wha likewise drudged thro' dub and mire, had he kent Kirkton Barbara Mearns, her ample gifts he wad admire!

Daibhidh FitzJames MacPharlain (D.J. Bates)

Far from Land. Michael Brooke, 2018. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-17418-1, hardback, 249 pages, £24.00.

Who doesn't love a seabird colony? They are wonderful places; the cacophony of sounds and the smell are never to be forgotten. But, what happens to their citizens outside the breeding season - where do they go? Do males and females spend the winter in the same parts of the oceans in their marital pairs, or do they have a temporary separation? These are just two of the many questions that Michael Brooke poses in this fascinating book and which he answers using examples from the great advances in our understanding of seabird biology that have been possible with the use of modern tracking technology.

This is a relatively slim volume, but one that is absolutely packed with information and all conveyed in an engaging and often witty style. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on adult migration and was again in awe of the immense distances covered by some species in a year, never mind a lifetime, of oceanic wanderings. The final chapter looks at the interactions of seabirds with humans, not all of which are positive from the birds' point of view. But, there are positive stories in here, with the use of technology again enabling biologists to find practical solutions to issues, including through collaboration with other interest groups. The subtitle of the book is *The Mysterious Lives of Seabirds* - Michael Brooke certainly lifts some of the veil of mystery in this very enjoyable book.

Andrew Bielinski

The Wonderful Mr Willughby: the first true ornithologist. Tim Birkhead, 2018. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4088-7848-4, hardback, 353 pages, £25.00.

Tim Birkhead has a track record of taking serious science about birds and making good stories that read well, and this is no exception. This time his subject is the ornithological pioneer Francis Willughby, born into comfortable circumstances in Warwickshire in 1635 and dying just 37 years later in 1672. Willughby's name is usually linked to that of his friend John Ray, originally his tutor, but also his inseparable companion, subsequently charged with publishing Willughby's ground-breaking work on bird biology and classification. Although Willughby was revered by Linnaeus, Pennant and White, Ray has been the subject of previous biographies which almost air-brushed his younger colleague out of history. Meticulous new research by the author places him back where he belongs in the pantheon of the ornithological greats.

Willughby and Ray lived at a time of transformational scientific discovery and progress, and they travelled widely and laboured tirelessly in single-minded pursuit of the 'new' knowledge. Tim Birkhead weaves their story deftly into the fabric of the period, infusing it with life and surprising detail.

Alan Knox

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

Observatories' Roundup is a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicise the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Following on from the very busy start to the spring caused by a good blast of easterlies in April, the spring continued to deliver some good birds, peaking with an incredible twelve hours when a Crag Martin (a first for Fair Isle and Shetland) on the evening of 14 May was followed the next morning by Fair Isle's (and Scotland's) fourth Song Sparrow. Both proved very popular and a number of twitchers arrived by scheduled transport and charter planes. The sparrow, being the first record in the UK since 1994, proved especially popular nationally, whilst the Crag Martin attracted more interest from Shetland birders, many of whom had seen at least one of the previous Song Sparrows on Fair Isle! A Black Kite, which appeared to be an intergrade between the eastern and western subspecies, arrived on 7 June having apparently spent the winter in Orkney and, if accepted, would be just the second record for Fair Isle. Slightly commoner on the Isle, a Serin buzzing around North Light on 16 June will be (subject to acceptance) our fourth record, but the first since 1964 and only the 10th Scottish record. A whole host of other goodies in the spring included 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler', two Thrush Nightingales (both trapped in the Plantation on the same day!), Rustic Bunting, Red-rumped Swallow, Blyth's Reed Warbler and three Rose-coloured Starlings along with good arrivals of Bluethroats and Marsh Warblers.

Plate 399. Red-necked Phalarope, Fair Isle, Shetland, 31 July 2018. © *David Parnaby*

Plate 400. Pallid Harrier, Fair Isle, Shetland, 8 September 2018. © *David Parnaby*

Autumn has (so far - print deadlines mean this is being written in the last week of September) been comparatively quiet. Some spells of easterly winds delivered good falls of Barred Warblers and Common Rosefinches, with rarities including two Lanceolated Warblers, a remarkable multiple arrival of Arctic Warblers (with at least five birds so far, including four in two days), Pallid Harrier and three Blyth's Reed Warblers. For the majority of the time though the autumn has been dominated by westerly winds, with not even any American birds to show for it ...yet! It really feels like when we get the easterlies, it's going to come really good...

Seabirds had a reasonably productive season, with Puffins and Razorbills having some of their best-ever breeding seasons in terms of productivity and Bonxies (520 occupied territories) and Gannets (4,291 occupied nests) both recording their largest-ever populations. It wasn't all good news unfortunately, with Kittiwake breeding numbers continuing to fall, whilst the 28 pairs of Arctic Skuas fledged just one youngster.

The main excitement amongst the other breeding birds was two broods of Red-necked Phalaropes being raised on the Isle, although only two chicks fledged. A Pintail seen with ducklings was thought to be the first breeding

Plate 401. Darvic-ringed Bonxie, Isla Cristina, Huelva, Spain. 11 August 2018. © *Miguel Rouco*

record for Fair Isle, but the presence later in the season of an apparent hybrid Pintail x Mallard complicated matters somewhat.

Amongst the interesting movements highlighted through ringing was a Great Black-backed Gull ringed in November 2014 being found dead on its breeding grounds in Russia. The Bonxie darvic-ringing project started to yield some really interesting results, with chicks from 2017 photographed off the south-west coast of Spain and the south-west coast of Ireland in summer/autumn 2018 (a rare insight into where our Bonxies spend their first summer after fledging), whilst a chick from 2018 was photographed flying along the Swedish coast, just our second record from this country and part of a record-breaking passage of this species noted along the Swedish coast at the time.

In terms of other wildlife sightings, it was a good spring for Lepidoptera, with more Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells noted than in recent years and a record year for Hummingbird Hawk-moths. Killer Whales again featured heavily in the spring, although it was a generally quiet year for cetaceans until a group of at least 60 Long-finned Pilot Whales moved south past the Isle on 6 September.

The FIBO 2017 Annual Report hit the nation's doormats in September (well, the doormats of those people who are Friends of Fair Isle) and is available for sale via the FIBO website, or by joining FOFI. As well as the usual reports on the year's birds and other wildlife, it contains a summary of Fair Isle Lepidoptera records to the present day.

On the Isle, there is no doubt that the biggest news has been the replacement of the two aged wind turbines, the oldest of which was the first commercially operated aerogenerator in Europe when it was built in 1982. The three new turbines are named Lukki Minni, Grotti Finni and Tushi - if you don't know who they are, be sure to ask Grace and Freyja when you visit! Along with a solar array and new battery storage, the new turbines are part of Fair Isle Electricity Company's £2.65 million power project. Amongst other improvements, this will deliver 24-hour power to the whole Isle for the first time. The project should be completed within days of this article being written and represents an incredible achievement for the islanders who have overseen it.

David Parnaby, FIBO Warden
Email: fibo@btconnect.com

Plate 402 a–b. Long-finned Pilot Whales passing Fair Isle, Shetland, 6 September 2018. © *David Parnaby*

Plate 403. Greenish Warbler, Isle of May, 27 May 2018. © *Scott Jones*

Isle of May Bird Observatory

It had proved a frustrating spring as, despite easterly winds, the glorious weather (plenty of sunshine and lack of rain) had produced very little in the way of migrants on the ground. Despite this, a Thrush Nightingale took everyone by surprise when it was caught and ringed on 4 May in less than perfect migration conditions. Otherwise highlights early in the month were confined to more unusual 'island records' with Ospreys over on 5th and 10th and a Stock Dove noted on 7 May (less than annual).

Pickings were slim thereafter, but spring eventually burst into life as the haar (sea fog) rolled in during the final week of the month bringing with it some great birding and heart-racing moments. The ice was broken on 23rd–25th as a female/first-summer-type Red-breasted Flycatcher was caught and ringed. Soon after one of the highlights of the spring was discovered; an elusive Short-toed Lark was found near the Beacon on 26th and although it remained for a further six days, it would often disappear for long periods of time. It proved to be the first island record in 20 years and only the sixth in total following individuals in 1977, 1985, 1993, 1994 and 1998 (all between 12 May and 4 June). The excitement did not stop there as a Marsh Warbler arrived the same day (the first since May 2012) alongside an Icterine Warbler (which lingered until 1 June) and a Black Redstart. The following day (27 May) produced similar conditions bringing a second Icterine Warbler (which stayed two days) plus a female Red-backed Shrike present by the Beacon late afternoon. The highlight of the day proved to be a mobile Greenish Warbler (which remained for two days) which was eventually pinned down to the Fluke Street area, representing the fifth spring record and first since 2016. The purple patch was not finished as the spring's second Thrush Nightingale was discovered by the Low Light in almost the same few minutes that a female Rose-coloured Starling was found near the chapel. The starling was part of a wider national influx and represented the third island record following individuals in 1991 and 1983. The bird was caught and ringed and went on to stay on the island until 4 June favouring the area around the north and east side of the Beacon. During this period, a third Icterine Warbler was found at the Low Light bushes on 2 June.

As expected, the summer months were dominated by breeding seabirds as passage migration went quiet with the exception of the occasional Cuckoo and Black Redstart. Night-time ringing activities produced a total of 33 Storm Petrels caught and ringed in August.

As usual, the autumn brought its fair share of highlights although the lack of any continuous easterly airflow (westerly winds dominated the

autumn) resulted in a quieter than usual autumn. As an indication of the dominance of the westerly winds, the island had only two Lesser Whitethroats and three Garden Warblers all autumn, with no Grasshopper or Reed Warblers at all.

Despite this, the island still claimed some good records including its first ever North American bird - a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper on 11 September. The bird showed well in near-westerly gales by the Beacon late in the afternoon and there was a strong hint of potentially a second bird but sadly this was not confirmed. The first whiff of an easterly wind brought an Olive-backed Pipit on 11–15 October with a different bird discovered on 17th–18th. The species is going through a purple patch at present as these represent the fifth and sixth records in just four years. Other noticeable highlights included an elusive Ortolan Bunting on 1–2 September (the first since September 2010) which was part of a wider national influx, Common Rosefinch on 1–3 September, Barred Warbler on 3 September and a female Hawfinch on 11 October. Sadly, a dead Corncrake found against the Main Light tower on 16 October would have been a welcome sight if seen alive whilst Yellow-browed Warblers were thin on the ground this year with five on 11th, three on 12th and two on 13–15 October.

From an island perspective, five different Treecreepers was noteworthy, as were two different Coal Tits discovered in October, both belonging to the British race. Tree Sparrows have become more of a feature in recent years with passage logged on seven dates peaking at 70 on 6 September, whilst hirundine passage on 2 September was noticeable with 210 Swallows, 600 Sand Martins and 250 House Martins - all significant counts for the island. Other highlights included a single Lapland Bunting on 3rd with three on 15 September, individual Water Rails seen on 28 September and 12 October, an Osprey on 15 August, whilst 'ringtail' Hen Harriers were seen flying west on 22 September and 4 October.

Seawatching produced the first Sooty Shearwaters on 10 July with a peak of 25 on 7 September, whilst Manx Shearwater passage peaked at 125 on 11 August. Amongst the large feeding frenzies noted around the island, a single Balearic Shearwater was found on 5th with two noted on 23 September. Other highlights included single juvenile Sabine's Gulls on 28 September and 5 October, Black-throated Diver on 3rd and 24 October and Black Terns on 18th and 25 August, whilst Pomarine Skuas were recorded on thirteen dates with a peak of eleven on 26 October.

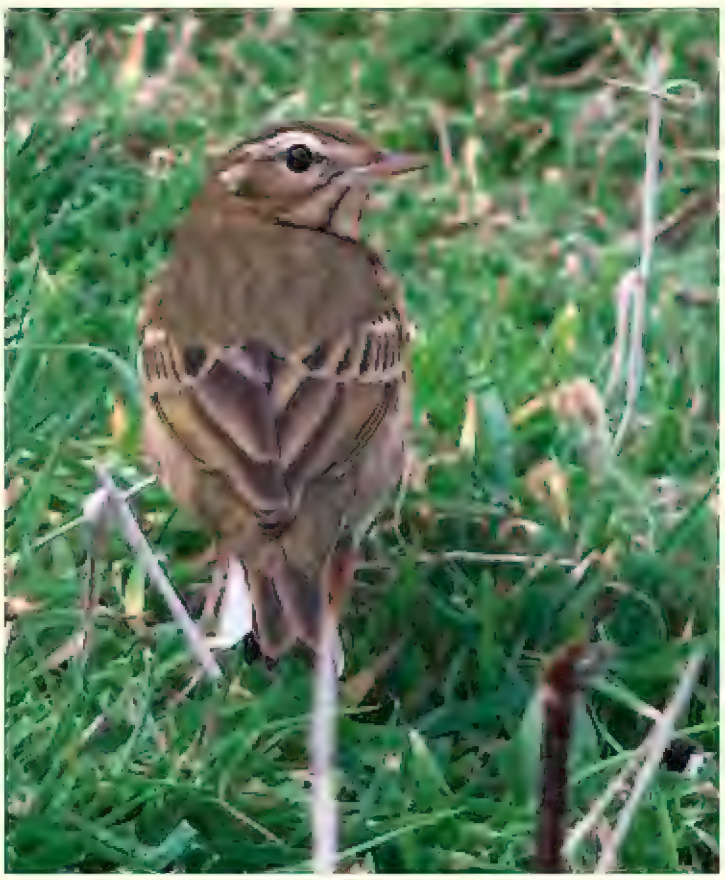


Plate 404. Olive-backed Pipit, Isle of May, 17 October 2018. © *David Steel*

Other seawatch highlights from an island perspective included a good passage of Brent Geese in late August–early September with 154 logged on five dates, individual Black Guillemots on 1st and 11 September and 13 October, various wildfowl including eight Scaup on 18th October and 28 Goosander on 11 September, both of which were record day counts for the island. As autumn progressed, a build-up of small gulls brought the expected appearance of Mediterranean Gulls with adults seen on six dates in late October–early November. A total of 169 species were recorded this year, the third highest in recorded history on the Isle of May.

David Steel, SNH Isle of May Reserve Manager
Email: david.steel@nature.scot

Plate 405. White-winged Scoter with Eider, Musselburgh, Lothian, March 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

White-winged Scoter, Musselburgh, 24 March–12 May 2018 – the second record for Lothian

C. RODGER

I am very fortunate to have Musselburgh as my local patch, with year-round birding, an impressive list of rare birds and always other birders around with whom to enjoy the craic.

However, on 24 March 2018, I was having a fairly dull day on the patch, with little of note being seen and a lack of fellow birders with which to grumble about the late start of spring migration. After giving the scrapes a once-over, I decided to check to see what was on the Forth, with the recent easterlies having recently produced regular Scaup, Black-throated and Great Northern Divers.

I set up the scope on the bench near the lagoons and sifted through the regular Long-tailed Duck, Red-throated Divers and Slavonian Grebes. Around 30 Velvet Scoter were dotted about in small groups, including a party of three sleeping drakes quite distant to the west. One of these clearly had a lot of white around the eye, which merited a closer look.

It should be noted that ever since a White-winged Scoter was identified retrospectively from photographs taken from the seawall at Musselburgh (on Boxing Day 2013), this species has been 'on the radar' for myself and other Musselburgh regulars. Nonetheless, I was fully expecting that this bird would turn out to be a roosting Velvet Scoter, with the low sunlight exaggerating the white eye markings.

However, on picking-up the bird again, although over 300 m distant, it really did appear to have a very striking white 'tick' running upwards behind the eye. This feature was consistently visible, even when the sun was behind cloud and allowed the bird to be followed after it woke up and began diving.

I was definitely interested by this point but needed a good look at the bill. This was actually very difficult due to distance, a fairly choppy sea and the bird actively foraging (and often diving immediately on surfacing due to the persistent attentions of a Herring Gull). However, I managed a few reasonable side-on views that definitely pointed towards White-winged Scoter, mainly thanks to comparisons with the accompanying Velvets.

Structurally, the black 'knob' (nostrils) on the upper mandible was not really visible at that range, but the bill appeared to slope down from the forehead (similar to Eider) and was not concave like the Velvets (which showed a clearly distinct bill and 'forehead'). There was a noticeably greater extent of black in front of the eye and side of the bill than in Velvet. The pale part of the bill simply looked off-white at distance and appeared confined to the tip of the bill, clearly demarked from the all-dark base. By contrast, the bill colour was clearly yellow on the accompanying Velvets, with the colour visibly extending back along the sides towards the bill base, below the darker part of the upper mandible (the nostrils). When seen in full profile, the scoter had an often strikingly different jizz to the Velvets, looking longer-headed (due in part to the sloping bill) and more bull-necked.

These features, although difficult to pick out at times, felt an exact match for the Blackdog (North-east Scotland) bird that I had seen in August 2016, and I'm quite sure that if I hadn't seen that scoter, I would not have been able to call this bird. Despite this, I was rather cautious about definitively identifying such a rarity and opted to inform the local grapevine for a second opinion, before putting news out more widely. Thanks are due to Martin Scott and Mike Hodgkin for co-ordinating Lothian's active birders, while I nervously kept track of the bird and attempted to secure some record shots.

Within half an hour, five of Lothian's best birders had arrived and very quickly put me at ease by agreeing that we were looking at a White-winged Scoter. With relief, I put the news out on our local WhatsApp group, knowing that this would quickly go out on the national grapevines. The scoter flock then promptly flew way out into the Forth, thwarting any attempts for birders to score that day. Fortunately, the bird has proven to be a long-stayer and obliged many visiting birders.

The initial field views did not allow the White-winged Scoter to be assigned to subspecies. However, record shots posted that evening showed enough bill colour and structure to lead to a consensus that this bird was likely to

Plate 406. White-winged Scoter (top) with Velvet Scoter, Musselburgh, Lothian, March 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

be an 'American White-winged Scoter' (*Melanitta deglandi deglandi*). This was confirmed over following days as the bird was observed much closer and seen to lack the steep, knobbly bill structure and yellow streak on the lower mandible that are typical of 'Stejneger's Scoter' (*M.d. stejnegeri*).

The scoter stayed at Musselburgh until the beginning of May, often approaching close to the sea wall. This allowed a full appreciation of the large black nostrils, reddish bill tip, slightly browner flanks and noticeably pinker legs than the Velvet Scoters. The scoter was watched diving and often feeding on razor shells (as were the Velvets), with these molluscs causing painful-looking protuberances, bulging out from the back of the neck.

Pleasingly, the White-winged Scoter has returned to Musselburgh after a summer sojourn (where I wonder?), first being seen on 9 September 2018. At the time of writing (early October), it appears that many birding 'crews' from the south are ticking this bird as they head north to Shetland.

Plate 407. White-winged Scoter, Musselburgh, Lothian, March 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

Plate 408. White-winged Scoter, Musselburgh, Lothian, March 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

I've spent a lot of time rarity-hunting in Shetland and elsewhere with modest success. However, this is the rarest bird I've found and is particularly special for being on my local patch (I've even managed to add it to my 'window list', as I live just west of the sea wall).

The White-winged Scoter at Musselburgh is the fourth Scottish record and, amazingly, the second record for Musselburgh. This only affirms what a great place Musselburgh is for birding. At the time of writing, it has just been announced that planning permission has been granted for 'restoration' of two ash lagoons at Musselburgh, including the creation of extensive wader scrapes next to the River Esk. This is in no small way down to the efforts of local birders, to whom thanks are due.

Musselburgh is a great place for birding and will be greatly enhanced by the planned extension of the wader scrapes in the westernmost lagoon. Therefore, Musselburgh is always worth a visit - and there's still the possibility of Stejneger's being found again!

Chris Rodger, Musselburgh
Email: chris.rodger@talk21.com

Plate 409. Killdeer, Foula, Shetland, 25 April 2018. © *Donna Atherton*

Killdeer, Foula, 25 April 2018 – the fifth record for Shetland

D. & G. ATHERTON

On the morning of 25 April, 2018, our route around Ham began positively with a skulking Grasshopper Warbler, a shy Hawfinch plus other new arrivals in good numbers. Feeling inspired, we headed south but it was quiet, so headed back. However, before we veered away from the South Ness, we scanned the open expanse of short grassy turf and Geoff spotted a suspiciously lone plover some distance away. Initially, it was facing away and the light wasn't in our favour, but as it turned to face us, it revealed its true identity in the form of a double black breast band.

During the next hour, we watched the bird foot tapping, head bobbing and feeding at leisure. It was so much more elegant and stylish than a Ringed Plover, and when it raised its neck the breast bands widened.

Despite returning to the area in the days after, we never saw it again. This was the fifth record for Shetland, the others being in 1970, 1993, 2007–08 and 2016.

Donna & Geoff Atherton,
Ham, Foula, Shetland.
Email: aldonaatherton@gmail.com

Plate 410. Killdeer, Foula, Shetland, 25 April 2018. © *Donna Atherton*

Plate 411. First-summer male Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *David Cooper.* Similar to our first view of the bird perched, tail typically held half-cocked, it reveals its dark crimson iris and narrow mixed red/white orbital ring, pinkish base to its dark-tipped bill and orange legs and feet and its plumage comprised subtly differing shades of matt slate-grey save for its well-marked darker lores and mask extending to both above and below its eye, whitish malar spot, brown-tinged remiges and vaguely buff-tinged flanks.

Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, 14 May 2018 – the first record for Shetland

D. COOPER & B. KAY

After three days of what had felt promising south-easterly winds, whilst our garden had played host to a singing male Bluethroat, it's fair to say that the numbers and variety of grounded migrants had proved a little underwhelming. Overnight to the 14th there had been a splash of rain, and perhaps just as importantly, a classic reversal in the wind direction to a north-westerly that sometimes seems to stop north-bound spring migrants in their tracks.

An early morning visit to Skaw produced a Lesser Whitethroat and a Willow Warbler, so although there were still far more perches than birds, by this spring's standards, it almost amounted to a fall! A walk along Lamba Ness added a female Pied Flycatcher that added to my suspicion that there was a thin scatter of migrants grounded across the island. In fact, there then seemed something for every birder active on the island, with a succession of messages received relaying news of another Pied Flycatcher, a Spotted Flycatcher, a male Red-backed Shrike, a male Bluethroat, a Sedge Warbler and a Marsh Warbler.

During the afternoon, we'd taken in Haroldswick, Burrafirth and Baltasound but had seen very little. By late afternoon, we decided to make the gardens along the road to Baliasta our last port of call for the day. We'd checked the gardens from the Manse to the cemetery that will be familiar to many birders, being the area which the Cape May Warbler frequented in the autumn of 2013. We were back in the car heading for Houlland when Brenda suggested that we take a look at a small sunken garden en-route, it looked something of a suntrap in the late afternoon sunshine. Having been out in the field for nearly 12 hours by then, I was flagging, and I almost didn't bother to stop...

...I parked the car, and walked across the road to the dry-stone wall opposite with the sun behind me. From immediately the other side of the wall, a tiny, long-tailed *Sylvia* warbler took flight, and with a typically weak and jerky flight, it set off low across the rough grass towards the wall the other side of the *c*.30 m wide field. Its jizz was that of a Dartford Warbler but its plumage appeared a uniform paler grey - even in that short flight - the possibility of it being a Marmora's Warbler flashed through my mind. It landed on the wall, perfectly lit by the sun, and basically appeared all slate-grey save for its darker lores, red eyes, pinkish base to its spiky bill and orange legs... and then it all too promptly hopped over the top of the wall and out of sight down the other side. Of all the miles of dry-stone wall to walk up to, I'd literally had the good fortune to choose the correct square metre of wall to do so! Despite the whole encounter lasting just a few seconds, I shouted to Brenda that it was a Marmora's Warbler, and for her to grab her camera. She rather calmly but reassuringly replied "oh, the all grey one with a red eye and orange bill and legs" that rather took me by surprise, as she seemed to know as much about the species that there is to know - it transpired that whilst looking for buntings in the *Collins Guide*, the *Sylvia* warblers had caught her eye, especially Marmora's Warbler - it had an unfamiliar name that she'd never heard me mention until now!

I still don't recall how I sprang over the fence/wall combination and crossed half the field in pursuit, but as I cautiously crept the last few metres with camera poised, unbelievably there was no sign of it. I'd seen exactly where it had disappeared, and had remained transfixed, hopefully ensuring that I didn't miss it fly again. I rechecked along the wall but there was still no sign of it. As I looked up I could see walls stretching away into the distance in just about every direction. Surely we weren't to be left without any further views or images of it. Initially I was almost at a loss as to know where to look. The sunken garden itself has a few *Rosa rugosa* bushes so I considered that the best place to start. I'd made my way halfway across the field towards them, when much to my relief it flew right past me heading in the same direction! It landed on some bare earth and hopped, tail held half-cocked, into the depths below one of the bushes. Still no images, but it soon worked its way up through the bush and perched briefly on the adjacent wall allowing for more views and we both quickly rattled off some images. It disappeared over the wall and out of sight again. I checked my images, and whilst confirmatory, the camera settings weren't great being on a very high ISO.

Plate 412. First-summer male Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *David Cooper*. The brownish hues visible to its tertial fringes and slightly faded and worn buff-brown primaries age it as a first-summer. The well-marked dark lores and mask then sex it as a male.

We walked the wall, but again, it had vanished in front of our eyes. We again checked the sunken garden and the immediate surrounding walls but there was no sign of it. Effectively, we'd had two very brief encounters but then completely lost it.

I explained to Brenda that Marmora's Warbler had recently been split into two species, and that we needed to eliminate the, albeit unlikely, possibility of it being a Balearic Warbler. Our first edition *Collins Guide* pre-dated the split and I was struggling to recall the features of Balearic Warbler. My own recollections of them from Mallorca was that they were paler, more silvery grey in appearance compared to the only Marmora's Warbler that I'd seen being the first-summer male at St Abb's Head in 1993 that I'd considered was darker, more sooty grey in appearance. I'd already noted that ours was also showing some brownish hues to its upperparts, and particularly its wings, which I was fairly sure I could recall helped age the St Abb's Head bird as a first-summer.

With no mobile phone signal, we drove to Houlland where we knew we would obtain a partial signal. Already approaching 18:00 hrs, I didn't think anyone would thank me for not putting the news out whilst we further considered the unlikely possibility of it being a Balearic Warbler, so Brenda used her smartphone to transfer a couple of 'back of the camera' shots along with an appropriate caveat that we didn't have any literature with us re Balearic Warbler onto the Shetland Whatsapp system. With the lack of bandwidth available, it took nearly ten minutes for each shot to upload to Whatsapp despite Brenda's arm being stuck up in the air out of the car window!

In the meantime, I spoke to my father, John Cooper, and he very quickly checked the *Sylvias* Helm Guide. The combination of its small white malar and dark throat swung it firmly in favour of Marmora's although I could tell that he was slightly perplexed by me describing its underparts as showing some buff. I then phoned Brydon Thomason and pretty much just said "Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, get here!" After a few expletives he said that he was about to take his son, Casey, to a youth club commitment but they'd now make their way via Baliasta... JFC then called me back to read me the text in the Helm Guide relating to a first-summer Marmora's Warblers that stated 'underparts more solidly coloured but, compared to adults, slightly duller and buffier overall'. Hence, nothing at all seemed amiss for it being a Marmora's. I then called Roger Riddington and ran through the identification features that we were using and his words were something along the lines of "it sounds like the job is done, I'd love to see it, please stick with it

Plate 413. First-summer male Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *Brydon Thomason*

until 21:00 hrs as I should be there about then...!" Whilst speaking to Roger the first Whatsapp message complete with photo pinged through. Paul Harvey soon phoned and ran through the features of Balearic and Marmora's Warbler. Someone also took the trouble to send to Brenda's phone the complete Surfbirds article dealing with the identification of the two species written by Brian Small.

Of course, by now, we wanted to return to the site to try and relocate and watch the warbler, so we simply didn't have time to reply to all of the incoming congratulatory messages. We returned and Brydon, Casey and Robbie Brookes were already there. Thankfully, Brydon and Casey had obtained views of the warbler but it had done its, by now, usual vanishing act over the top of a wall. However, it didn't take long for it to reappear just prior to Al Conlin arriving. Brydon had helpfully brought his copy of *Sylvias* that on seeing the plates only reinforced our view that it was a Marmora's and not a Balearic Warbler. Whilst elusive, it seemed to have a discrete circuit feeding in and out of nooks in the dry-stone walls. It helped that it was a lovely sunny, warm and calm evening.

Others had to leave, but Robbie and I both decided that we would remain on site until 21:00 hrs but then we received the news that Mark Warren had found a Black-faced Bunting at Norwick! Dilemma, we decided that we just had enough time to take a look for, and hopefully see it, but still return to Baliasta before the birders arrived from the mainland. Unfortunately, we failed to find the bunting but did arrive back at Baliasta, along with Brydon, just before Pete Ellis, Paul Harvey, Dougie Preston, Roger Riddington and Paul Sclater arrived off the ferry. A tense wait ensued, but just after the sun dropped below the hillside, the warbler obliged. It then gave its most prolonged and close views to the assembled small group of observers. It gave a few quiet calls comprised of short, hard, slightly slurred and scolding '*chak*' notes strung together - that actually reminded me of a quiet version of some of the calls of a mobbing Arctic Tern but very different to the long drawn-out churring call of a Dartford Warbler. It also gave what two former members of BBRC considered was 'a clear response' to a short playback of the song of

Plate 414. First-summer male Marmora's Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *Robbie Brookes*

Marmora's Warbler - Brian Small's article suggested that neither species reacts to the playback of the other's song. It then flicked into a garden that offered plenty of suitable cover for it to roost and all the observers left the site.

I was so wired that I was still awake at 01:00 hrs and it was proving a calm, clear and very bright night - unfortunately there was no sign of the Marmora's Warbler or the Black-faced Bunting the next day.

Interestingly, the Marmora's Warbler at Spurn in June 1992 also arrived amongst an east coast fall of birds of Scandinavian/northern European origin that included both Red-backed Shrike and Marsh Warbler (*Birding World* 5(6): 217).

Finally, we'd like to acknowledge the help of John Cooper, Paul Harvey, Roger Riddington and Brydon Thomason for all openly sharing their expert opinions with us.

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Plate 415. Black-faced Bunting, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *Mark Warren*

Black-faced Bunting, Norwick, Unst, 14 May 2018 - the third record for Shetland

M. WARREN

After a regular attendance in the early noughties, I'd only just started to return to Shetland after a protracted period of allegiance to North Ronaldsay, Orkney. Now, employed as a Heatherlea wildlife guide, I was leading a spring trip which began up on Unst. We were a couple of days in to our trip and I was chuffed, after overnight rain, to find a pre-breakfast male Red-backed Shrike near our hotel and even more so, that it was still there for my clients to appreciate post full-Scottish! After this, I stuck to 'plan A' heading up to Hermaness to enjoy the fantastic seabirds for several hours in glorious sunshine, later relocating to Baltasound to hunt for migrants again - and get an ice cream! Here, while relaxing, we were told of a Bluethroat near Norwick - we dashed over to look for this most-sought-after bird for our group but unfortunately, we didn't find it.

Instead, on our arrival one of the first birds I saw was a bunting, flying up from the road in front of us and into a bush. First thoughts turned to a female Reed Bunting, but there seemed to be a lot of white in the outer tail, covering T6, T5 and a fair amount of T4 - too much for that species surely? As I helped the group locate the bird it flew again, this time landing on a garden wall. Finding myself looking at a small passerine with a grey head, streaky brown back and whitish underparts as the cogs in my brain continued to struggle - a Dunnock, eh? But it had white outer tail-feathers! A potential species suddenly sprang to mind and in a flash I dropped to my knees to get a scope on it, just catching sight of a black patch at the front of the face and a pale, pinkish bunting-like bill before it flew again. Telling the group "This has to be a Black-faced Bunting, but I've never seen one before!" likely sounding like I'd lost the plot but I explained the features as it showed again briefly in a bare tree. Then it vanished.

For what seemed like an age (but was closer to 45 minutes), we just couldn't find it, instead we located a number of migrants (but not the Bluethroat) and a flyover Osprey bearing at least some consolation. With views so brief, and having spent time helping my clients, I hadn't really seen enough myself. I had no photo, so there was no way I could be 100% certain before making a claim as big as Britain's first spring Black-faced Bunting! Dinnertime at the hotel was rapidly approaching and despondently we gave up, but as we walked back to the bus, suddenly there it was right in the middle of the road! This time I nailed it, views were better and we found giving it space to move out from verges and feed in the road allowed all the group to get decent views through the scope while I grabbed a few record shots. Happy but hungry, I drove the group back at the hotel but with no phone signal I then hurried over to Dave and Brenda Cooper's house to ask them to release the news - only to learn DC had been busy finding a Marmora's Warbler at Baliasta at the very same time!

Plate 416. Black-faced Bunting, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, 14 May 2018. © *Mark Warren*

Returning to the site before dinner, I found the bunting easier this time, gaining marginally better photos and taking a mental description of what I could see. Most of the time, I focused on the head and face which though essentially grey had the subtle, yet distinct black patch in the loral area, between the eye and bill. Other bunting facial features included a narrow, paler grey submoustacial and a very thin, blackish stripe between this and the paler throat. A brownish spot was at the rear of the grey ear coverts and it had a finely streaked (grey and brown) crown. The supercillium was unmarked and solid grey. This overall greyish coloration extended part way down the nape and also around the front and onto the bird's breast which was finely streaked but finished abruptly with a rather sharp demarcation at the white based belly. Flanks and undertail were also white but I could see some fine streaking in the former although this was sparse to non-existent in other underpart areas. Its mantle was brown with bold black streaks as were its matching wings, with brown feather edges to blackish centres on individual flight feathers. Two paler, whitish wing-bars were formed by tips to the greater and median coverts. I didn't really see the base colour of the tail but I hadn't realised that Black-faced Buntings had so much white in the outer tail feathers. Legs were bright, bubble-gum pink and the small bill was very like that of a Little Bunting. It was the same pink colour as the legs with a dark smudge to the top edge of the upper mandible. It was also nice to hear the bird calling a couple of times, bearing similarities to the other *ticking* buntings but fuller and more drawn out.

I last saw the bird disappearing into one of the gardens and with no other birders having arrived (they were all at the Marmora's), I went back to the hotel to join my group for dinner. Once fed, we returned but there was no sign with the whole area now in deep shade and fewer birds actively feeding. Shetland locals searched for it in vain the next day as we did for the Marmora's Warbler but there was no sign of either. But... we were lucky again, scoring great views of the Terek Sandpiper (after a fab day on Fetlar) at Virkie that evening. The Black-faced Bunting might have been brief but the drama and unexpected exclusivity of such a rarity for our Heatherlea group makes for a great story. I'll be looking forward to guiding again in Shetland in next spring!

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Plate 417. Song Sparrow, Fair Isle, Shetland, 15 May 2018. © *David Parnaby*

Song Sparrow, Fair Isle, 15–18 May 2018 – the fourth record for Scotland

D. PARNABY

A Crag Martin found by visiting birder Keith Pellow late in the evening of 14 May was a first for Fair Isle and looked set to be the outstanding highlight of a decent spring's birding on the Isle. With several Shetland birders keen to see this first for Fair Isle and Shetland we were hoping it would be relocated, having vanished from the cliffs of North Haven shortly before dusk.

What nobody was expecting was that the call to the Obs from Assistant Warden Richard Cope at 07:30 hrs the following morning wouldn't be with an update on the Crag Martin's location, but would be to say "Song Sparrow at the Plantation!" shortly followed by confirmation that the bird had been trapped and was on its way back to the Obs.

The bird had flown up the trap and clung briefly to the wire mesh near the catching box where its distinctive striped grey and brown head made its identification straightforward for Richard given his experience of the species, and other American sparrows, from his time at Long Point Bird Observatory in Canada.

Obs staff, guests and interested islanders had gathered to witness the bird being ringed and processed (along with a Hawfinch that had been trapped at the same time) before it was released into the Obs garden.

Identification was straightforward, with a very intricately marked head, showing a host of grey and rich-brown stripes, white underparts with dark-brownish streaks, some of which showed darker centres, along with a distinctive dark central spot on the chest. The mantle was pale greyish with heavy streaking. The overall

appearance of the bird was similar to a large bunting, with a long-tail and short primary projection and a thick, triangular, grey bill.

It remained on the Isle until 18 May, usually around the Obs feeders, although on the last day it was more unsettled and roamed to the Plantation and Gully. The Obs feeders are situated just outside the lounge windows, so the views of the bird were particularly good and it would show regularly as it fed on seed on the ground. It could disappear for spells of half an hour or more, during which time it was presumably lurking in the thick vegetation of the garden.

During its stay, five charter flights made the trip north, other people twitched the Isle on scheduled transport (some of whom were ready to head to Unst for the Marmora's Warbler and Black-faced Bunting of the day before, but diverted to Fair Isle instead), a number of birders who were booked into the Obs for a spring holiday timed their stay nicely and several Shetland birders day-tripped on to the Isle (although for most of those the Crag Martin, which had been relocated, was the bigger draw).

If accepted, this will be the fourth Song Sparrow for Fair Isle and Scotland, with the previous three (in 1959, 1979 and 1989) all arriving in April. There are four other UK records, three in May and one (the most recent) at Seaforth Docks, Lancashire in October 1994. With 50% of the British records, Fair Isle can, perhaps surprisingly, claim Song Sparrow as one of its 'specials'. The fact that the other British records involve two from island bird observatories and one trapped at Spurn Bird Observatory (as well as the presumably recently 'jumped ship' bird at Seaforth) could suggest that their behaviour or choice of habitat makes them more likely to be found in sparsely vegetated or intensively watched sites, similar to Lanceolated Warbler and other skulking vagrants.

Plate 419. Song Sparrow, Fair Isle, Shetland, 15 May 2018. © *Richard Cope*

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Plate 418. Song Sparrow, Fair Isle, Shetland, 15 May 2018. © *Richard Cope*

Plate 420. Pacific Golden Plover, Findhorn Bay, Moray & Nairn, 31 July 2018. © *Gordon McMullins*

Pacific Golden Plover, Findhorn Bay, 31 July–22 August 2018 – the first record for Moray & Nairn

G. McMULLINS

I am a recreational birdwatcher, and occasional taker of photographs, who has the good fortune to live in the coastal town of Findhorn, Moray & Nairn. I usually go out each day into, or around, Findhorn Bay to observe the beautiful scenery and wildlife which includes bird counts. The bay and its surroundings cover a huge area, so makes any birdwatching a real challenge and luck plays a large part to any sightings.

Previous to my first sighting, I had been contacted by Martin Cook (our local recorder) about what appeared to be an unusual 'plover' at Spey Bay. Only having previous knowledge of Golden and Grey Plovers I thought a look at my *Collins Guide* would be useful in case it passed my way. The guide showed that the Pacific and American Golden Plovers were very different in structure and markings but then I thought no more about it.

The morning of 31 July was reasonable, not too windy or raining, to which I am very used. I went to the bird hide off the B9011. I got my wellies and coats on, then, armed with binoculars and telescope, I wandered off onto the flats as normal. Why I chose to go toward Minton Point (NJ0463) I have no idea, but after about 400 m I came across some 'little men', in this case Ringed Plovers, scuttling about, so I stopped to investigate. On closer view, there stood very still amongst them was a plover with black breast and underparts and white shawl, however, what was most noticeable was the coarsely marked, in black and white, rump and tertials.

My thoughts went back to Martin's bird and I was pretty sure this may be what he was looking for! It was then that I remembered my camera was back in the car. Having collected my camera, I soon returned to find the bird missing; so okay I thought to myself, that was one that got away? About 20 minutes later I re-located the Ringed Plovers and as luck would have it the interesting plover was still with them.

My limited experience of vagrants has shown that these are much more tolerant of people and therefore I was able to get within a distance of 10 m to take some pictures. So tolerant was this particular bird that I had to walk around it to get a rear view and photograph!

I e-mailed Martin a photograph asking "is this your bird" and it was soon confirmed by an excited phone call. Then came much debate amongst the birding fraternity over which bird we had. The lack of 'bulge' in the shawl and long tertials with quite short primary projection told us we had a Pacific Golden Plover. This is the first recorded sighting in Moray & Nairn.

Plate 422. Pacific Golden Plover, Findhorn Bay, Moray & Nairn, 31 July 2018. © *Gordon McMullins*

My last sighting of the plover was on 22 August, when by good fortune, I was looking for the cause of the commotion when a Peregrine flew past and corralled all the Oystercatchers together with the exception of one bird that just 'ducked' down. This time the camera was to hand and I was able to get photographs, albeit a little more distant, but showing the bird nearly through its moult.

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Plate 421. Pacific Golden Plover, Findhorn Bay, Moray & Nairn, 31 July 2018. © *Gordon McMullins*

Plate 423. Sooty Tern (composite), Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, July 2018. © *Harry Scott*

Sooty Tern, Ythan Estuary, 20 July–5 August 2018 – the first record for North-east Scotland

R. DUNCAN, J. DUNCAN, P. BLOOR, H. MAGGS & P. CROCKETT

Raymond Duncan begins the story:
A bird in the hand... getting eaten alive by midges... and a few more still to extract from the mist net. On 20 July 2018, I was ringing Sand Martins in a wee sand pit colony at Waterside Farm, Forvie on the east side of the River Ythan, just down river from the Newburgh to Cruden Bay road bridge. This is part of a River Ythan Sand Martin project, connecting quarry owners with 'their' birds and investigating any potential differences between the composition of birds caught in the colonies and those caught in the nearby reedbed roosts during the late summer.

Then I heard the call. It was coming from the river, carrying loud and clear above the noisy groups of calling Arctic and Sandwich Terns flying around. Twice... three times... it sounded a bit like a dog's squeaky toy. It's a while since I've not been able to place a bird call to at least a family in my local birding area and I wondered if it was maybe one of the Spoonbills which had been seen recently. I tried to ignore it, as I was busy with the Sand Martins, but it called again and sounded closer. I had to give it a look, so quickly bagging a Sand Martin, I raised my bins and there it was... a very striking largish black-and-white tern flying around calling distinctly amongst

all the other terns. It looked a bit like a mini-skua with its long, slim wings, powerful wing beats and long tail streamers. Bridled Tern immediately sprung to mind, as one has been seen previously on the Ythan, but I knew there was a similar species and couldn't remember its name. With such a striking looking bird (i.e. nae an LBJ), I thought it would be a shame if it remained unidentified but I was still busy extracting Sand Martins. By some miracle, I actually had my mobile with me, it was even charged and switched on! I quickly called Phil Bloor ...no reply. Moray Souter ...in Aberdeen. Phil Crockett ...no reply. Phil Bloor once more ...he replied! I told him there was "a Bridled Tern" flying around below the Ythan Bridge and, after a quick garbled exchange of where exactly it was, we hung up.

I extracted the remaining few Sand Martins and returned to where I was ringing them nearer the river. The calling had stopped and I hadn't been able to keep watching the tern but I did notice Phil was there already, the auld Land Rover parked slap bang in the middle of the bridge and Phil scanning for the tern. I've never seen anybody stopped on the bridge before! After a quick phone exchange, Phil was off to pick up Hywel Maggs from his house in Newburgh and search further down river. Once I'd finished ringing the Sand Martins, another quick phone exchange with Phil and a very excited "we've nailed it, a Sooty Tern, what a bird, brilliant" or words to that effect meant they'd managed to catch up with it again and identify it with pretty good views (and sounds!) in the fading daylight.

I nipped home, returning to the estuary with my wife Judy to meet up with Phil and Hywel who relayed their part of the story:

On reaching the estuary, we had been greeted by the typical tern chaos caused by thousands of noisy 'sea swallows' at the Ythan mouth. We set up a telescope and started scanning the mosh of terns landing on the mussel beds. It was now *c.* 21:40 hrs, so birds were looking for

roosts. As Hywel scanned the congregating mass, Phil let out a blast of "its here!". We both instantly got onto the bird with help from its amazingly distinctive call, cutting through the Sandwich and 'commic' tern din with crystal clear clarity.

The bird landed *c.* 200 m away and we both took turns viewing through the scope in the failing light. We had a quick and frantic discussion on the key features between Bridled and Sooty Terns, then double-checked the online gen. It was clear this was a Sooty and not a Bridled Tern, based on the rather squeaky wader-like '*eewa*' call, restricted white forehead with no extension above the eye, dark underside to the primaries and overall size (appearing almost as big as a Sandwich Tern). In flight, the Sooty Tern appeared almost Arctic Skua-like, with long wings and bouncy flight. At times, the call seemed quite like an Arctic Skua short call too.

A breathless Phil Crockett arrived just as dusk was setting in - once he'd clocked the bird through the other Phil's scope there were hearty handshakes all round. By 22:45 hrs, the Sooty Tern was roosting so we began to leave.

After an absence of a few days, Phil Crockett and his father Richard were lucky enough to pick it up again on its return to the estuary during the evening of 23 July - thereafter the tern remained quite settled around the estuary for the remainder of that week and was last seen on 5 August.

Raymond Duncan, Judy Duncan, Phil Bloor, Hywel Maggs & Phil Crockett, c/o 1 Airyhill View, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire AB41 6DW.
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Postscript. The irony of all this isn't lost on me. A few years ago, I approached Harry Scott at a ringing meeting and moaned at him about the amount of 'twitching' stories in *Scottish Birds* - I had counted and it was a third of one of the magazines. "How about some ringing?" I said. "Okay do it" he replied, and Ringers' Roundup was born... and here I am now writing a twitcher's story! ***- RD***

Plate 424. Sooty Tern, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, July 2018. © *Peter Stronach*

Plate 425. Hooded Merganser, Pullar's Loch, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, August 2018. © *Kristofer Wilson*

Hooded Merganser, Lerwick, 15 August–3 September 2018 – the second record for Shetland

K. WILSON

In my younger years, I was a keen birder but after many years of college, university and work, I no longer even owned a pair of binoculars. Little did I know that an opportunity to relocate with work to Shetland would help me to re-ignite the passion for wildlife that I'd once had as a youngster. A non-bird-orientated visit to Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) in April 2014 with a group of friends kick-started things. A Cretzschmar's Bunting, a bird which I hadn't even heard of before never mind having seen before, had been found down the south end of Fair Isle. The buzz going around the isle following this find was infectious it wasn't hard to get drawn in, especially when the bunting was followed up with a 'Caspian Stonechat'. Fast forward a few years to 2017 and I was fortunate enough to be offered a short-term position at FIBO as a volunteer assistant warden. Following my time at FIBO I knew the only way to really improve my birding knowledge was to get out and about my local patch, South Nesting, on a regular basis. My intention was to get to know my local common birds better so that if anything 'different' turned up I'd at least have a rough idea of what to look out for to put a tentative identification against.

On 15 August 2018 at around 14:00 hrs, half way around my usual census route, as I was finishing scoping the Loch of Freester, a notification appeared on my phone from the 'Nature in Shetland Photos' Facebook page. The notification was from a local and regular contributor to the page, Mary Stevenson, looking for help to identify a bird she had seen earlier in the day. My initial thought when I looked at the photo was that it was a sawbill, not a Goosander or a

Red-breasted Merganser, so by a process of elimination meant that the most likely candidate was a Hooded Merganser. I knew that it definitely wasn't an adult male, however having never seen a Hooded Merganser in the field and the lack of an obvious hood, I was hesitant to put out the news without a second opinion and without even knowing the location of the bird.

I sent out a few messages to some local birders and also posted a screenshot onto the 'UK Bird Identification' Facebook page. I decided that rather than sit and wait for responses I was going to try and locate the bird even though I didn't have a location. I hedged my bets a bit though that the photo was taken on Pullar's Loch in Lerwick as I was aware Mary regularly took photos there, so I took a chance and headed for Lerwick, about a 20–30 minute drive south.

Pullar's Loch is a very small loch in the south side of Lerwick, located just a stone's throw back from the sea on the eastern side of the Ness of Sound. There are often a number of birds to be seen in and around the loch with easy viewing from the roadside. Unfortunately, when I got to Pullar's Loch there was no sign of the bird. However, it was clear that although there was no sign of the bird, it had definitely been photographed there on a distinctive stone at the eastern side of the loch. By this time, I had received a number of messages confirming that it was indeed a female Hooded Merganser and now, at least, I was able to confirm the location.

Unsuccessfully, I spent the next few hours checking other possible locations in the Lerwick area trying to relocate it. With the news out on our local WhatsApp group, a few local birders were also out looking, but it wasn't re-found until 19:30 hrs that night when it landed briefly on Pullar's Loch before taking flight again heading north. Some of the very helpful responses to my post on the 'UK Bird Identification' Facebook page also led to the discovery that the bird had also been photographed at 10:00 hrs by Robert Archer in the Voe of Leiraness on the western side of Bressay. The Voe of Leiraness is just a short distance away from Pullar's Loch and it appeared that the Hooded Merganser was moving between the two areas and later on during its stay in Lerwick it added Clickimin Loch to its circuit. At around 20:15 hrs the Hooded Merganser flew back into Pullar's Loch where it remained at least until light was lost. The next day, 16 August, it was again re-found on the loch, feeding well and it appeared to be in heavy moult with numerous feathers being removed during preening. As the moult

Plate 426. Hooded Merganser, Pullar's Loch, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, August 2018. © *Kristofer Wilson*

Plate 427. Hooded Merganser, Pullar's Loch, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, August 2018. © *Kristofer Wilson*

continued throughout its stay in Shetland the 'hood' which wasn't obvious on the initial photograph became more obvious, especially when the bird was swimming away.

I am aware there has been some discussion around the origin of this Hooded Merganser, personally though, I am pleased to have been able to spend some time in the field with an un-ringed and un-tagged Hooded Merganser and in a variety of different weather and light conditions.

I understand that there has been one previous Hooded Merganser as an accepted record for Shetland in 2006, however, there was also an unaccepted historical record going all the way back to 1884. The Unst Hooded Merganser, present from 15 April to 2 May 2006 which was accepted by the BBRC was a male, which would make this the second record for Shetland and the first female (if it were to be accepted).

Many thanks to everyone who played a part in the initial finding, helping to confirm the identification and the initial relocation of this beautiful bird.

Kristofer Wilson, South Nesting, Shetland.
Twitter: @Carmond_K

Plate 428. Hooded Merganser, Pullar's Loch, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, August 2018. © *Kristofer Wilson*

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 July to 30 September 2018

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The species order is that of the IOC World Birdlist as adopted by BOU on 1 January 2018.

Rose-coloured Starlings continued to be widely reported, while the highlight for many in late July/early August was the Sooty Tern which frequented the Ythan Estuary. The SW–NW winds which set in from August largely stifled migration from the east, with a much-reduced showing than expected, while Foula stood out with a 'purple patch' in September. The returning American White-winged Scoter was again off Musselburgh from mid-September.

Taiga Bean Goose: there were 140 birds in the regular Slammanan flock (Clyde) from 27 September. **Garganey:** a female was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) to 4 July; one was at Scoughall (Loth) on 18–19 August; a juvenile was on North Ronaldsay on 25 August; one at Frankfield Loch (Clyde) on 26 August to 13 September, and one at Capringstone Flash, Irvine (Ayrs) on 11 September. **American Wigeon:** a drake was at Loch Eye, near Tain (High) on 30 September. **Black Duck:** the regular drake was present at Strontian (High) throughout. **Ferruginous Duck:** single drakes were at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 20–25 July, and at Loch Leven (P&K) on 9–13 September. **Ring-necked Duck:** an eclipse drake was at Loch of Skene (NES) from 31 August to 5 September, and a drake at Gartmorn Dam (UF) on 16–21 September. **Lesser Scaup:** a female was at St John's Pool (Caith) on 1 July, and a drake was at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve, Loch Leven (P&K) on 11 September. **King Eider:** the regular drake was still off Murcar/Blackdog (NES) to 11 July; an eclipse drake was off Nairn M&N) on 4th and 16–18 September, and an eclipse drake in Burghead Bay (M&N) from 25 September into October. **Surf Scoter:** a female was off Blackdog (NES) on 7–20 July, a drake in the Sound of Taransay, Harris (OH) on 27 July and 24 August to 20 September, with two there from 21 September, and a drake in Lunan Bay (A&D) on 1–30 August. **'American White-winged Scoter':** the returning drake was off Musselburgh (Loth) from 9 September into October. **Smew:** a redhead was at Loch Eye, near Tain (High) from 10 September into October. **Hooded Merganser:** one was at Port Allen, near Errol (P&K) on 3 August; a female was at Pullar's Loch, Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) from 15 August to 3 September, with same at Voe of Leiraness, Bressay (Shet) on 15 August and Loch of Clickimin, Lerwick on 24th.

Cory's Shearwater: singles flew north past Dunbar (Loth) on 6 July; NNE past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 8 August, and south past Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 25 September. **Great Shearwater:** one flew past Point of Ardnamurchan (High) on 19 August, and one past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 19 September. **Balearic Shearwater:** one was off Carnoustie (A&D) on 10 August; one flew north past Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 12th; one flew SW past Hynish, Tiree on 26th; one past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27th; two past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 29th, and one past the Isle of May on 5 September. **Barolo (Little) Shearwater:** one flew south past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 16 September. **Pied-billed Grebe:** one was still at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) to 20 August.

Black Stork: a juvenile was at Forties Bravo Oil Platform, about 180 km NE of Aberdeen (NES) on 2 August before flying off east. **Spoonbill:** one was at Loch of Mey (Caith) still on 1 July; two at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 2–10 July, with one on 20–25th and 5 August, and two on 6–24 August, and nearby at Meikle Loch on 23rd, with five on the Ythan again on 3 September; two at Loch Doon (Ayrs) on 26 July; two at Windwick, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27–31 July, and four at Loch of Wester (Caith) on 3 August, with two there on 4th and four on 8th. **Bittern:** singles were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 8–15 September and at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 24th. **Little Egret:** generally under-

reported, but singles were on South Uist (OH) in September, and at Loch of Tingwall, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September, while higher counts included six at Guardbridge (Fife) on 11 September.

Honey-buzzard: one flew south over Fair Isle on 23 July, and one south over Sandside Woods, Reay (Caith) on 27 July. **Pallid Harrier:** a juvenile male was on Fair Isle on 8–12 September. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one flew over Slains Castle/Cruden Bay (NES) on 28 September. **Spotted Crake:** one was on Foula (Shet) at the start of September. **Crane:** four were still present at the Ythan Estuary (NES) to 25 July, two were at Broch/New Pitsligo (NES) on 16 July; two flew over New Aberdour (NES) on 20 July; four were at Meikle Loch (NES) on 1 August; one flew over Brora (High) on 10 August, with presumed same nearby at Golspie (High) also on 10th; four at Auchmacoy, near Ellon (NES) on 16 August; five at Meikle Loch on 20–23 August, three at Mains of Blyth, near New Pitsligo on 24 August; five at Collieston/Meikle Loch (NES) on 11–16 September; one at Gilston (M&N) on 15th; three SW over Crimond (NES) om 17th, and five at the Ythan Estuary on 21–22 September.

Stone-curlew: one was at Rigifa Farm, Cove (NES) on 19 August. **Pacific Golden Plover:** an adult male was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 31 July to 22 August. **American Golden Plover:** an adult was at Sandaig/Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 18–23 July; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 4 August; one at Skinflats Lagoons (UF) on 18 August; an adult at Sandaig, Tiree on 29 August to 17 September, with two on 12th; one near Seatter, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 8–16 September, with two there on 21st; an adult on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19–26th; an adult at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 20–30th; an adult at Sandaig, Tiree on 24th; a juvenile near Graven, Yell (Shet) on 28th, and an adult on Sanday (Ork) on 29–30 September. **Whimbrel:** at least 150 (as two flocks) flew south past Fife Ness (Fife) on 26 July. **Baird's Sandpiper:** an adult was at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 12–14 August; one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 14 September, and one at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 17 September. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 15–23 August, and one at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 29–30 July. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** in August, there was one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28th and two at Donmouth, Aberdeen (NES) on 29th. In September, there were up to three on Shetland, three on Orkney, 10 on the Outer Hebrides and up to six on Tiree (Arg), while elsewhere one was near Kenly Burn/Kingsbarns (Fife) on 8 September; one on the Isle of May on 11 September - first for the island, and one at White Sands Quarry (Loth) on 21–22nd. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** singles were at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 11–13 July; at Vatshoull, Whalsay (Shet) on 23 July; at Turquoy Bay, Westray (Ork) on 25th, and Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 29–30th. One was at Loch Bhrusda, Berneray (OH) on 4 August, and in September singles were at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 2–8th; at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) on 9–11th; at Tyninghame Bay (Loth) on 11th; two at Loch of Strathbeg on 12th; singles at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 14th; at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 14–17th; at Wilderness GP, near Ladybank (Fife) on 14–18 September; at Musselburgh Lagoons on 15–30th; at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH), at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist and on Iona (Arg) on 18th; at Loch Sandary, North Uist on 20th; at Meikle Loch (NES) on 22–28th; at West Gerinish/The Range, South Uist on 23rd, with three there on 28th; at Findhorn bay (M&N) on 26th, and at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 27 September. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** one was at Loch Ordais, Lewis (OH) on 29 September. **Red-necked Phalarope:** singles were at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) and at Loch na Muilne RSPB Reserve, Lewis (OH) on 8 July; a juvenile at St John's Pools (Caith) on 27–28 July, and at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 25–26 August. **Grey Phalarope:** singles were at Barns Ness (Loth) on 24 August; off Corsewall Point (D&G) on 29 August; south past Maidens (Ayrs) on 16 September; at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 19 September; at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) on 20–22nd ; near Eigg (High) on 20th; in Spey Bay (M&N) on 25th; south past Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 25th; and on 30th, and at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 27 September. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at Houb, Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 9 September, and one at Askernish, South Uist (OH) from 27th.

Sabine's Gull: an adult was at Cleatt, Barra (OH) on 9 July; one at sea about 92 km NNW of the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 6 August; one at Loch Bracadale, Skye (High) on 19 August; a first-summer at St Kilda (OH) on 20–21 August; one off Lossiemouth (M&N) on 26 August; one off Duntulm, Skye on 20th; one off Corsewall Point (D&G) on 20th with two off there on 27th; a first-summer at Nairn (M&N) on 21st; a juvenile at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 27th; a juvenile off the Isle of May on 28 September; a juvenile off Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) and an adult off Collieston (NES) on 29th, and one south past Maidens (Ayrs) on 30 September. **Bonaparte's Gull:** a second-winter was at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on

15–17 August. **Franklin's Gull:** one was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 31 August. **Mediterranean Gull:** very few reported away from the Firth of Forth, where a new Scottish record count of 68 (59 juveniles, a second-winter and eight adults) achieved at East Wemyss (Fife) on 11 September, with several colour-ringed birds noted there since July. **Ring-billed Gull:** a second-winter was at Traigh Bhialais, Vatersay (OH) on 5–19 August, and an adult at Rubha Hanais, Tiree (Arg) on 14 August. **Glaucous Gull:** *c.* 22 reports mainly in the west and north; elsewhere, one at White Sands Bay (Loth) on 27–30 September. **Iceland Gull:** extremely low numbers - in July a juvenile was still at Portree, Skye (Arg) to at least 3rd with two there on 7th; a juvenile on Oronsay (Arg) on 1st; an immature at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 6th; one at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 14th, and one at Greshornish Salmon Farm, Skye on 16th. Just one in August: a second-winter lingering at Portree to 12th, and three in September - a juvenile on Fair Isle on 23rd; a second-winter at Drumlemble (Arg) on 29th, and one on Unst (Shet) on 30th. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was at Bishopburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 26–27 July; an adult at Browhouses (D&G) on 5th and 12 August, and one at Soleburn, Loch Ryan on 1 September.

Sooty Tern: an adult was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 20 July to 5 August, also visiting Peterhead (NES) on 1 August and Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 1–2 August. **Black Tern:** singles were off Fraserburgh (NES) on 21 July; off Cullen (M&N) on 22 July; at Cairnbulg (NES) on 23rd; at Whiteness Head (High) and at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 28th; at Kinnaird Head (NES) on 30th, and at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 31st with two there on 1 August. Singles were at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 3–4 August, with two there on 5th; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) and off Scoughall (Loth) on 4 August; two flew past Kinghorn (Fife) on 10th; singles were at Slains Pool (NES) on 13th; off the Isle of May on 18th and 25th; off Fife Ness (Fife) on 18th; then at least two off Pettycur Harbour (Fife) on 26th; four past Kinghorn on 27th, with singles there on 28th and 31 August; one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) and two off Corsewall Point (D&G) on 27th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28th; one at Pettycur Sands (Fife) on 30–31st, with three there on 1–2 September and one still to 7th; one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 2–4 September; two at Kinghorn on 2nd, with four there on 3rd and two past on 8th; one off Gullane (Loth) on 8th; two at Anstruther (Fife) and nine off Pettycur on 11 September; two off Carnoustie/Barry Buddon (A&D) on 14th, and one on 28th; singles in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 16th,19th and 20th; two off Corsewall Point on 19th; one at Sands of Evie, mainland (Ork) on 20th; and one was at Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) on 22 September into October.

Pomarine Skua: singles were at sea 64 km NW of Papa Westray (Ork) on 1 July; at sea 32 km E of St Kilda (OH) on 11 July; off Lossiemouth (M&N) on 28th, and seen from the ferry near North Uist (OH) on 31 July. Twenty-nine in August: 17 on the east coast mostly singles south from Lossiemouth to Eyemouth (Bord) - one on 19th; and the rest from North Ronaldsay (Ork) or the Outer Hebrides, with peak counts of three past Vatersay (OH) on 23rd and off Lossiemouth on 29th. In September, about 40 were noted, mostly singles from Boddam, Mainland (Shet) - one on 25th, south to Musselburgh (Loth) - one on 28th, and Corsewall Point (D&G) - 8 birds on six dates. Twenty on the east side with a peak of seven at Ferryhills, North Quensferry (Fife) on 29th, and two at Corsewall Point on 12th and 22 September. **Long-tailed Skua:** one was at West Loch of Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 7 July, with four there on 8 July (including a dark-morph bird) and five on 10th; one flew past Brevig, Barra (OH) on 8th, and one over Bolnabodach, Barra on 11 July. In August singles were at Norwick, Unst on 2nd; off the Uig–Lochmaddy ferry (Arg/OH) on 8th; past Peterhead (NES) on 21st; off the Kennacraig–Ellen ferry (Arg) on 23rd; at Tobermory, Mull (Arg) on 23rd, and five passed Pettycur Harbour (Fife) on 28 August. In September, one was off Slains Castle (NES) on 14th; one flew over Ferryhills, North Queensferry (Fife) on 17th; one passed Fife Ness (Fife) on 28th; one flew past Scoughall (Loth) on 29th, and three passed Hound Point (Loth) on 30 September.

Turtle Dove: singles were at Cromarty (High) on 26 July to 3 August; on Foula (Shet) on 28–30 September, and at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 29 September. **Snowy Owl:** the female was still on St Kilda (OH) into October; one was near Carinish, North Uist (OH) on 7th and 11 July, at Sollas, North Uist on 15 July, and at Grenitote, North Uist on 19 July to 11 August. **Hoopoe:** singles were at Cromarty Lighthouse (High) on 7–18 September; at Skelbo Castle (High) on 21 September, and at Millbounds, Eday (Ork) around 25th September. **Wryneck:** singles were at Burra, Trondra (Shet) on 28 August; on Fair Isle on 31 August and 2nd and 6 September, with two on 7th and one on 9th; at Quendale, Mainland and at Sumburgh, Mainland (both Shet) on 6 September, and at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 8th. **Red-footed Falcon:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27 August, and at Start Point, Sanday (Ork) on

29 August. **Hobby:** singles were at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 18 July; over Noss Sound/Bressay (Shet) on 4 August; on Fair Isle on 7 September, and at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 17 September. **Gyrfalcon:** single white-morph birds were near Balnakeil (High) on 6 August; on Fair Isle on 8 August, and at Saxa Vord, Unst (Shet) on 9 August.

Red-backed Shrike: one was still on Fair Isle to 2 July; single first-winters were on Fair Isle on 1 September; at Treshnish, Mull (Arg) on 21–24 September; at Heylipol, Tiree (Arg) on 23–30th; at Garth, Mainland (Shet) on 25–30th; at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 26th, and on Westray (Ork) on 27 September. **Woodchat Shrike:** a first-winter was at Barns Ness (Loth) on 16–29 September. **Golden Oriole:** a female/first-winter male was at Ham, Foula (Shet) on 25–26 September, and one at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 26–27 September.

Plate 429. Barred Warbler, Unst, Shetland, 3 October 2018. © *Peter Garrity*

Yellow-browed Warbler: the first of the autumn were singles at Baltasound, Unst (Shet), Frakkafield, Mainland (Shet) and Fair Isle on 6 September with only about 40 more by the end of the month (over 350 in same period in 2017), all on the Northern Isles except for singles at Langais, North Uist (OH) on 26–27th and at Bragar, Lewis (OH) on 30th. **Arctic Warbler:** singles were at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 14 August; on Fair Isle on 16 August; at Hestingott, Mainland (Shet) on 27 August; at Culsetter, Mainland (Shet) on 31 August to 3 September; at Sellafirth, Yell (Shet) on 3 September; on Fair Isle on 5th, with two there on 6th, three on 7th, and two on 8–9th; one at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 13th and one on Fair Isle on 14–18 September. **Greenish Warbler:** singles were at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 1–2 August; at Newtonhill (NES) on 9 August; on Fair Isle on 31 August to 2 September, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7–12 September. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** singles were at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 6 September; at Norwick, Unst on 6–10 September; at Rerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; at Ham, Foula (Shet) on 9–19th, and on Fair Isle on 9th, with two there on 10th, and another on 18–19 September. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 28–30 July; on Fair Isle on 13th and 27th August, with two there on 28th and one still to 1 September, and another there on 6–8 September and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8 September. **Booted Warbler:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 31 August and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 24 September. **Melodious Warbler:** singles were at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 2 September; at Melby, Mainland (Shet) on 3 September and at Lunna, Mainland (Shet) on 29–30 September. **Icterine Warbler:** singles were on Fair Isle on 27–29 July; at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 28–30 July; on Fair Isle on 11 August; on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 August; two on Fair Isle on 31 August; one at Ham, Foula (Shet) on 3 September; on North Ronaldsay on 4–6 September; at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 5th; near Loch a' Phuil, Tiree (Arg) on 7th, and at Baltasound, Unst on 21 September. **Lanceolated Warbler:** singles were trapped & ringed on Fair Isle on 5th and 11 September and on North Ronaldsay on 10th. **Barred Warbler:** first of the autumn was one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 31 July to 3 August, and singles on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 August, with about 23 more by the end of the month with a peak of seven on Fair Isle on 31st, and all on the Northern Isles except for one at Kings Links, Aberdeen (NES) on 31st. There were over 65 noted in September, virtually all on the Northern Isles, except for singles on the Isle of May on 3rd; at Melvich (High) on 13th; at Bunavoneader, near Tarbert, Harris (OH) on 16th; at Wick (Caith) on 21st; at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 28th, and at Cornaighmore, Tiree (Arg) on 30th. **Subalpine Warbler:** a first-winter was at Burrafirth/Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 19–20 September. **'Eastern Subalpine Warbler':** a female was still on Fair Isle to 31 July.

Rose-coloured Starling: single adults were still at Bullers of Buchan (NES) to 10 July; still at Borve, Barra (OH) to 29 July; near Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 11 July; at Ardnave, Islay (Arg) on 12–14th; on the Isle of Grimsay (OH) on 13–17th; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 17th and two at Balephuil, Tiree on 23–24th, with one still on 25th three on 27th, and one to 31st; at Peterhead (NES) on 17th; at Scarp/

Plate 430. Common Rosefinch, Boddam, Shetland, 5 October 2018. © *Peter Garrity*

Hushinish, Harris (OH) on 18–27th; at Vatsetter, Yell (Shet) on 19–28th; at Leckuary, near Lochgilphead (Arg) on 23rd; on St Kilda (OH) on 24th, with two there on 27th; singles at Ardfern (Arg) on 26th; at Waternish Point/Geary, Skye (High) on 27–29th; at Houster, Mainland (Shet) on 27–31st, and at North Tolsta, Lewis on 30 July. In August one was still on St Kilda on 1st, with two again on 2nd, and one still on 21st; singles still at Balephuil on 2nd, and at Kenovay, Tiree on 17–25th; at Marvig, Lewis on 5th; at Stornoway on 6–19th and on 29th; at South Nesting, Mainland (Shet) on 7th; on Fair Isle on 9–12th and at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 27–28 August. In September, single adults remained on St Kilda to 15th; at Stornoway still to 3rd; on Tiree to 5th, a juvenile was at Barns Ness (Loth) on 21–30th, and an adult at Bonar Bridge (High) on 26 September.

Bluethroat: singles were on Out Skerries (Shet) on 17th, 20th and 23–25thSeptember. **Nightingale:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–21 August, and one at Dale, Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 17 September. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** one was on Fair Isle on 1 September. **Citrine Wagtail:** singles were at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 31 August; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 14 September; at Norwick Unst (Shet) on 21–22 September; at Saxa Vord, Unst on 30th, and in Village Bay, St Kilda (OH) on 30 September. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on Fair Isle on 9th, 11th, 14th and 24 September.

Hawfinch: away from breeding areas singles were noted at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 30 July; on Fair Isle on 4 September; at Stakkaflits, Fetlar (Shet) on 20 September and South Nesting, Mainland (Shet) on 23rd. **Common Rosefinch:** one of the few eastern migrants apparently unaffected by the westerly winds, with at least 14 in August, with the first being singles on Fair Isle on 4th and 21st, with a further three there and the rest all on Shetland; up to 85 were noted in September, virtually all on the Northern Isles again, with high counts of six on Out Skerries (Shet) on 18–19th, and four there on 20th and 28th and three on 30th; and four on Fair Isle on 2nd, five on 3rd, 5th and 7th and three on 8th and 25th. Elsewhere, there were singles on the Isle of May on 1–3 September, at Kilminning (Fife) on 4th; at Duncansby Head (Caith) on 15th; at Ardroil, Lewis (OH) on 18th; at Gleann, Barra (OH) on 21st, and on St Kilda (OH) on 24th and 26 September. **Two-barred Crossbill:** a male was reported on Westray (Ork) on 13 July, with two at Links of Notland, Westray on 19th, and three on 20–21 July.

Ortolan Bunting: singles were on the Isle of May on 1–2 September, and on Fair Isle on 6th and 23–28 September. **Little Bunting:** one was at Lund, Unst (Shet) on 17–20 September, and one briefly at Hobbister RSPB Reserve, Mainland (Ork) on 21 September. **Rustic Bunting:** one was on Fair Isle on 2 July. **Yellow-breasted Bunting:** a juvenile was at Vatshoull, Whalsay (Shet) on 22–23 September. **Black-headed Bunting:** one remained at Norwick, Unst (Shet) to 1 July. **White-crowned Sparrow:** a first-winter was at Ristie, Foula (Shet) on 30 September. **White-throated Sparrow:** one was at Harrier, Foula (Shet) on 7–30 September. **Lapland Bunting:** one landed on a boat 74 km north of Rona (OH) on 7 July; first of the autumn were singles on Fair Isle on 31 August, 2nd and 6–7 September, and over the Isle of May on 8 September. Further singles were on St Kilda (OH) on 11th and 13th; at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 12th and Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 12–13th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12–26th; six at Aird à Chaolais, Vatersay (OH) on 13th; two on Fair Isle on 14th, with five there on 15th, two still to 18th and one to 25th; four at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 17th and 19th, with 55 there on 18th; one at Stoneybridge, South Uist (OH) on 18th; two on St Kilda on 21–22nd; one over St Andrews (Fife) on 22nd; one on Foula (Shet) on 23rd, with two on 24–27th; two at Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) on 23rd; one at Labost, Lewis on 26th; two on Fair Isle on 27th, with three on 28th, one on 29th and two on 30th; four on North Ronaldsay on 27th, two still on 28–29th and three on 30th; two on Foula and one at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30th, and one at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 28th. **Snow Bunting:** first of the autumn was one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20 September, and three on Fair Isle on 21st, with about 75 reported by 30 September, including a peak of 20 on Fair Isle on 24th. All were on the Northern Isles except for one at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 25th and five at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 28th.

Scottish Birds

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 431. While I was in the hide at the Rothiemurchus Fishery (Badenoch & Strathspey), waiting to photograph fishing Ospreys, the guys warned me that they were about to restock the pond. After an uneventful hour, they arrived with a barrel full of 1 lb Trout. The change was immediate, this Grey Heron soon arrived and promptly set about catching a Trout. It struggled several times to manoeuvre it into its mouth, picking it up and putting it down again as I snapped away. During this time, I heard a huge splash as an Osprey dived and missed. On reviewing my images of the heron, I found I had one with half an Osprey entering the shot! Then a Hooded Crow appeared and tried nipping in for a few pecks every time the heron put the fish down. They jockeyed for position, dancing around each other until eventually they both gave up, leaving the fish on the bank. I left soon afterwards, very happy, with some good Osprey shots too!

Equipment: Canon 7D mk2, Canon 400 f5.6 lens, aperture priority, spot metering, ISO 640, shutter 1/1000, aperture f7.1.

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